SOCIAL WORKS? EDI — Issue 3, Spring 2023

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axis

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*Social Works? journals are like buses. You wait for years for a new one to be published and then two come along in just over 12 months.*

That's all good with us though, and we hope it's good with you too, especially when we're able to share a special issue on a topic that's really close to our hearts.

This edition of *Social Works?* is devoted to the role of social art and artists in achieving and advocating for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. It grew out of a project that we've been involved in since 2021 alongside Manchester Metropolitan University and Social Art Network. Social Artists for Equality Diversity and Inclusion—or SAFEDI as the project is also known—set out to better understand the barriers faced by underrepresented people and communities in accessing culture and creativity. We have long known that social art can create positive changes in society and that artists are often unusually well-placed to highlight and challenge the unjust systems that continue to exclude too many people.

In addition to articles by some of the brilliant artists commissioned as part of the SAFEDI project, we are also delighted to be able to share pieces by contributors selected through open call in May. It was important for us to be able to present a real cross section of the work going on in social practice just now, from raising the visibility of BME arts and artists to disability activism and artistic interventions in the justice system and under-resourced neighbourhoods.

We really hope you will enjoy this collection of writings and word-image productions by social artists in the UK and beyond, and that you find something thoughtful, inspiring and informative as you continue your own EDI journey. If you would like to get in touch with any feedback, please do so at: **hello@axisweb.org**

Happy reading!

**Lucy Wright**
**Editor**

# *INTRODUCTION*

**As part of our commitment to equitable access to the arts and supporting artists, Axis has been working with researchers at Manchester Metropolitan University School of Art and artists through Social Art Network (SAN) to deliver Social Art for Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (SAFEDI).**

**SAFEDI began as an Arts and Humanities Council (AHRC)-funded pilot research programme looking to support EDI practices and then continued as a support structure around what EDI may develop into within the arts. The publication of this issue of the journal is one of those outcomes, exploring how artists across the country are responding to the topic of policy and the arts within the tumultuous times we live in.**

We hope to raise the profile of social art practice in a gallery-centric art world and demonstrate the power of change that the work we do can bring, especially in fostering anti-colonial and anti-disablist approaches.

The art that we strive for can support a route to solving some of the issues around access if adequately supported. This goes beyond the F-word... funding. This is about how organisations function and work, especially how they commission and produce. So many of us have been burnt by good intentions held poorly. How can we work differently together? How can we share the knowledge and learnings of what we do? This edition of Social Works and the upcoming publications of SAFEDI are part of this journey.

Axis currently has 3 strategic priorities: To help artists engage with the challenges and opportunities of a changing world by cultivating an inclusive and supportive community; Developing relationships with a wider and more diverse audience, by offering opportunities to share and experience the visual arts; and Improving Organisational effectiveness by listening. Action-research projects like SAFEDI and the *Social Works?* journal do exactly that.

This work has positioned us as leaders in how artists work with communities and audiences and helped to cement our reputation as 'the small arts organisation that cares'.

SAFEDI is the third part of a series of research projects done in collaboration with Dr. Amanda Ravetz. My own role spanned representing Axis as a Lead Artist / Creative Producer and representing Social Art Network as a co-Caretaker of the national mutual aid group.. This was an opportunity to move public research funds towards artist support working directly with self-identified marginalised groups. This work was created with policymakers / institutions interested in reframing how they listen to community members and how they see themselves in relation to them. It brought the knowledge and experience of those currently being excluded into the heart of policy making practice, furthering the long-term aim to reposition social practice as the leading champion of EDI in the visual arts.

Through my work with SAN I've been lucky enough to be a part of wonderful conversations happening around the country, of incredibly powerful activist work that is based on restorative justice and equity. From testimonies I have witnessed current delivery strategies do not support EDI practices in social art commissioning and active community involvement. The larger organisations (arts, health, local authorities) that commission social artists are all too often ill-equipped to support social art production, while the smaller arts organisations specialising in social practice often lack the necessary resources to do so as holistically as they may wish they could. We need equality as an underlying basis to deliver an equity that accounts for disadvantage. This requires a restructuring

***The Art of Activism, Your All-Purpose Guide to Making the Impossible Possible (2021)*** *was recently doing the rounds and beautifully positions collaboration as a type of activism.*

***The Radical Imagination: Social Movement Research in the Age of Austerity (2014)*** *unpacks how collective works to unpack social change and is useful to better understand how activism and collaboration are intertwined.*

***What We Made: Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation (2013)*** *examines the intersection between activism and participation in contemporary art.*

***The Citizen Artist : 20 Years of Art in the Public Arena (1998)*** *positions the role of artist as both citizen and activism in the context of collaborating with larger communities on social change.*

of an entire system of meritocracy that has history on its side. But we have the future on our side. This journal issue goes beyond sharing practice: here we offer new framings around art appreciation and definitions of aesthetics that change how we consider and view art and its function in society.

And we are not just aiming to do that to others. At Axis and with our partnership with SAN we aim to embed all this learning into how we operate as a charity and organisation. Together we hope to grow and influence other partner arts organisations. A previous example is the *Safer Spaces Agreement* authored by SAN now adopted across arts organisations in the UK.

Consider this journal issue as a campaign of change. One that we invite you as reader to join as a movement of practice. Being an activist takes many shapes and forms and definitions. We know this in the work we do. I'm offering in closing some key texts that inspire me to be a part of this learning and to keep the fire burning into the future. I will see you on the front lines of creative action!

**R.M. Sánchez-Camus**

**SAFEDI Lead Artist and Axis Development Associate**

## *RM Sánchez-Camus*

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Marcelo's practice focuses on creative social engagement in cultural production alongside sector development of social art practice. He is Artistic Director of Applied Live Art Studio (ALAS), a social art practice studio working across the UK. He also builds support and exchange systems for communities, creative practitioners, art workers, and scholars working in and invested in cultural democracy. He co-founded and is co-caretaker of Social Art Network, a UK-wide association of creative professionals dedicated to socially-engaged work.

As part of the Axis team, Marcelo is our Development Associate leading on Social ARTery and Phygital (an action-research programme investigating hybrid digital/in-person participation in the arts). He was also lead artist on Social Art For Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (SAFEDI), an AHRC fellowship with Manchester Metropolitan University producing research findings around arts access and arts policy.

Project partners have included Museum of London, Horniman Museum, Freedom Festival, IN SITU European Outdoor Arts network, Tate Exchange London, Artangel, People United and various councils across the UK.

# *ABOUT AXIS*

**Axis is an independent charity committed to supporting artists and profiling the work they do.**

Spanning the whole of the UK and beyond, our core programme includes—but is not limited to—commissions, events, research, insurance, spaces, resources and mentoring.

Since 2015, we have placed special emphasis on supporting social practice art, partnering with Manchester Metropolitan University and Innovate UK on three action-research projects, 'Validation Beyond the Gallery' (2015), 'From Network to Meshwork' (2020) and 'Social Art for Equality Diversity and Inclusion' (2021). We have been publishing Social Works? journal since 2018.

We believe that socially engaged art creates positive changes in society and we are committed to supporting artists and the people they work with to make good things happen in their communities.

To find out more about Axis or to become a member, visit:
**www.axisweb.org**

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**Content warning: The articles contained in this edition of *Social Works?* reference a range of sensitive topics including racism, violence, poverty, mental health struggles and incarceration.**

# *ADI LERER*

## Paradoxes of EDI in UK publicly-funded art institutions: Imagining pathways of reflexive social practice

**A new definition of the word 'museum' was agreed in summer 2022 at the general assembly of the International Council of Museums (ICOM).**[1]

The definition reads:

> *A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing.*[2]

This new definition was composed after convoluted deliberation around the previous proposed definition, which reads:

> *Museums are democratizing, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures. Acknowledging and addressing the conflicts and challenges of the present, they hold artifacts and specimens in trust for society, safeguard diverse memories for future generations and guarantee equal rights and equal access to heritage for all people.*

> *Museums are not for profit. They are participatory and transparent, and work in active partnership with and for diverse communities to collect, preserve, research, interpret, exhibit, and enhance understandings of the world, aiming to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing.*[3]

What is particularly revealing about these two definitions is the change that most museums are either currently undergoing or resisting. After all, what is a definition if not a shared construction of how something functions or fails to do so?

The current proposed definition will antagonise, appease, or leave you ambivalent— just like the museum itself.

Such failure is also lurking in the topic of this essay on imagining ways towards a social practice in publicly-funded art institutions. The development of the two contrasting definitions reveal key discussions in and about the museum, including the nature of its civic role, and whether there is a need to destabilise or change the power that museums hold.

The social practice described in this text holds a critical lens to the function of the art institution while applying social curatorial activities. To understand better the power dynamics at play between the public, art practitioners and museums, the respective work of Michael Foucault and Sylvia Wynter are relevant. Foucault argues that regimes of power dictate truth according to its image, truth in the sense of norms, while Sylvia Wynter asks us to learn and understand the construction of the prevailing hegemony. Wynter charts the prevailing colonial superiority that continues to measure norms according to their image (pure/impure/, rational/ irrational). Foucault suggests investigating these workings of power not at the centre but *'power at its extremities, in its ultimate destinations...in its more regional and local forms and institutions'*.[4] Foucault is charting resistance to the prevailing power through 'subjugated knowledges', *'a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated'*.[5] Wynter, on the other hand, is asking us to investigate the mechanism of what renders these knowledges subjugated in the first place.[6] Denise Ferreira da Silva sharply interprets this as mere *'consequence and not as the ultimate determinant of the ideological production of subject'*.[7] Words such as equality, diversity and inclusion, should be examined against who and what structures create conditions of its antonyms i.e. inequality, uniformity, and exclusion.

The conception of the museum in the eighteenth century embodied the state's civic building mechanism according to its construction of truth and norms. Although you could enter a public space, contemplate what was being exhibited, and assume a democratic invitation of participation, the choosing of how and what to see had already been carefully selected by individuals who were aligned with the socio-political order of the day. The norm of what constitutes culture and being in the world subsequently imposed exclusion on other forms of being. This form of educating the masses included 'acceptable' art forms and divisions

of art movements and periods that dominate our perception of art history in the present day, including hierarchical representation of human vs. nature, and presentation of artifacts, often brought violently from imperial conquests. Any presentation that was outside of the norm was perceived as the 'Other' through which the public could internalise what is and is not civilised.

This mechanism of exclusion continues to be felt. Art institutions have undergone some dramatic changes since their conception, but still struggle with (or resist) ridding themselves of their roles as universal postulators of knowledge. Consequently, they fall short in meaningfully internalising a heterogeneous culture and the effect of globalisation, which creates a more complex perception and meaning making for identity, nation and cultural heritage.[8]

Social curatorial practice within art institutions builds on the historical lineage of social and political artistic practices. From the early formation of the historical Avant Garde in the early 20th century, we can trace artistic rejection of Western modernist attitudes, meshing politics and artistic utopian horizon as a collective endeavour. Not only did their activities fail to topple the institution, but their innovative practices were absorbed into the institution and subsequently neutralised. The integration of politics and art since then is symptomatic of the promise of freedom of choice (democracy) and the formation of the 'bourgeois' ideal way of living that cannot be extended to the masses. Rooted in capitalism, museums were established through exploitation, and have later relied on global neoliberal formations, which gradually diminished the welfare state and spaces of collective agency. These conditions exposed a loop dynamic between the institution and artists, of critique, absorption and neutralisation. Artists could no longer separate their artistic singularity from the condition of their citizenship, which prompted some to use their practice to search for alternative ways of living, protest, and resistance, mainly in collective forms.[9]

Since the 1990s, we have seen the art institution's 'public service' image weakened due to its gradual integration into the global market and the state's full absorption into the global neoliberal economy. The civic function of the institution was enacted symbolically and the call for democratic representation in the public sphere also functioned symbolically. What it created is the reduction of identity into, what Hito

Steyerl called the overall spectacle of "difference" – without effectuating much structural change.[10]

The state divested itself of its responsibility to tackle socio-economic issues by delegating social work to institutions that are themselves inherently exclusive. This has a chain effect on the institution and individuals to comply, which echoes Foucault's understanding of the workings of power in unassuming places and micro activities. Socially engaged practitioners need to navigate the parameters of terms such as EDI, not only in the project itself but also in their critical engagement with the institution's compliance with these terms.

The precarious conditions that art workers need to negotiate in order to make work and live, in turn impact the unequal and fraught relationship with the institution. The artist might adopt a singular, entrepreneurial attitude—in constant pursuit of the next project—or attempt to create a radical collective mode, constructing alternative ways of living and resisting neoliberal protocols.[11] These conditions are still insufficiently supported in policy and put a strain on the practitioner to fulfil the EDI principles called for by the institution.

Social practice in the institution exposes the challenge of institutional co-option, which in turn neutralises the initial call for change. It neutralises it because it is being deliberated in an already hierarchical institution that is deeply embroiled in marketisation and pressured to stay in line with hegemonic state ideologies, such as the 'retain and explain' policy which means that historical statues will only be removed in the most exceptional circumstances. Social practice might inform the public of various socio-political issues but it will do so in a sanitised environment. The risk is that the work then becomes mere representation, a simulation of the real thing and an obstacle to change. When we talk about the ability for social change through art, we are drawing on established debates on revolutionary tendencies and the critique of social practice attempting to bridge the gap between art and life. This echoes the argument articulated by Stakemeier and Vishmidt, about the affirmative stance of social practice because it aims for a positive change.[13]

To illustrate some of these challenges, I will draw on my experience of Home from Home (HFH), a programme for refugees and asylum seekers at Tate Liverpool (TL) which I curate in collaboration with Community Programme Manager at TL,

***ART INSTITUTIONS SHOULD USE THEIR PRIVILEGES TO CREATE OPPORTUNITIES OF ENGAGEMENT WITH LOCAL CHALLENGES, TOGETHER WITH PEOPLE.***

Alison Jones. HFH, by the institution's categorisation, is an 'engagement programme'—an activity that is usually managed by the institution's Learning and Education department which aims to bring art and life closer together. In the practices of curatorial departments, we could find exhibitions that present social practice work, but the two practices rarely meet, and when it does happen it carries the potential of a much-needed platform from which to confront the relationship between art, life, and the institution. The HFH programme grew out of a 2019 collaboration with British Red Cross Merseyside (BRCM), in which I developed and led an art project for their service users. I completed BRCM volunteer training, and the project was also informed by research undertaken during my MA in Exhibition Studies, completed in the same year at Liverpool John Moores University. Having approached Alison Jones at TL, we created a pilot programme in 2020 called Talking Pictures and then the HFH programme in 2021, gradually building our partner networks of organisations that support asylum seekers in the city, with local artists, and art students. We kept the programme open for people to dip in and out.

Foucault's mechanism of power could be unpacked by asking, what can the art institution offer to vulnerable newcomers in the city that no other organisation

***WHAT CAN THE ART INSTITUTION OFFER TO VULNERABLE NEWCOMERS IN THE CITY THAT NO OTHER ORGANISATION CAN?***

can? We know art institutions like TL hold power and privilege, not only in their connection to the state and enactment of Western art history, but also in maintaining vertical categorisation of value and hierarchical knowledges. The institution has tangible assets such as actual space and facilities that are now contested due to the continuous closure of public spaces by local authority funding cuts.[12]

Wynter's demand for suppressed truths to be carved into normative knowledges could be activated through the artworks inside the institution. They are the catalyst of the social practice in the HFH programme. Looking at the artworks we can experience freedom to imagine and freedom of expression, and at the same time this can prompt critical conversations about the restrictions of freedom and how and why the artworks were acquired in the first place. This ushers in other narratives and truths apart from the canonical ones. During the programme we not only instruct but also participate. We incorporate English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) learning and art workshops, mentoring sessions, and invite local art institutions to introduce their organisation to the group. We learn together what each other's strengths are so as to broaden opportunities for participation. We research artworks from our own experience that create a dialogue with artworks on display. This helps to demystify the work on display and reveals links and influences that open up new knowledge. Members of the group can choose whether to give a talk in the gallery to the public presenting their findings.

Meanwhile, I am in dialogue with different departments in the institution itself regarding colleagues' participation in the programme, about text for the press, editorial conversations of any literature or audio visuals about the programme. I suggest exercising a critical lens where social practice does not operate in a silo, relevant only during the delivery of the 'project', but instead informs our approach when in dialogue with the institution. In an ideal scenario, there should be a mutual understanding between workers and management, either contracted or permanent staff, scrutinising decision making, asking *'who do we serve, and who gains from it?'*.

Art institutions should use their privileges to create opportunities of engagement with local challenges, together with people. But it is no use if the engagement does not affect the internal workings of the institution. The institution should be willing to ask itself, 'what are our values and what stops us realising them?' This

is particularly important if the institution is constrained by reliance on the market e.g. corporate sponsorship, business models and obsessions with being 'world class' which mean the exclusion of non-conforming aesthetics, and the exhausting manufacturing of reports desperate to prove that investment in the arts is economically profitable. These conditions obscure and dilute the basic value of art and art making with the 'business of art'.

My outsider/insider status in HFH allows me to learn where the gaps between the principles guiding the programme and the institution's structure matrix are. I believe we must adopt a critical lens in dialogue with the institution, to think beyond the production, management and delivery of a programme, and constantly interrogate the relationship of the institution to the things we are doing and saying. This reflexive approach also prompts me to examine my own normative attitudes, and how to navigate the sometimes-uneven relationship between a practitioner and the institution.

Kim Charnley suggests that contemporary social practice is not straightforwardly co-opted by the institution and yet it has not lived up to its revolutionary promise. He goes on to say that its strength is when it fails *'or points beyond the limits of its own effectiveness'* in a way this failure exposes the current disarticulation of the institution.[14] The work being done during HFH can be highly beneficial and rewarding but the institution's implication with hegemonic power and its Janus-faced nature can play into preserving the unequal status quo. The educator Nora Sternfeld suggests *'the museum is neither the street of demonstration nor the parliament. It is however a political place...it is connected to the street and to the parliament and so it (should) use the specific qualities of the museum to question the museum itself'*.[15]

When I described the idea of people in the programme giving a public talk about their findings in the gallery to a curator not involved in the programme, he said *'so it is an intervention?!'*. I said I didn't think of it that way: instead I thought of it as exercising their right of commoning in a public space. At the moment, it is both.

*I thought of it as exercising their right of commoning in a public space.*

1. *ICOM is a non-governmental membership organisation for museum professionals' that researches standards of museums' practice and make recommendations on cultural heritage.*

2. *News. 2022. ICOM. August 25. Accessed August 26, 2022. https://icom.museum/en/news/the-icom-advisory-council-selects-the-museum-definition-proposal-to-be-voted-in-prague/.*

3. *Adams, Geraldine Kendall. 2019. Rift emerges over Icom's proposed museum definition. August 22. Accessed May 02, 2022. https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2019/08/22082019-rift-over-icom-definition/.*

4. *Foucault, Michel. 1977. "Two Lectures." In Power / Knowledge Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977, by Colin Gordon, 82. New York: Vintage Books.*

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Wynter, Sylvia. 2003. "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/ Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation-An Argument." The New Centennial Review 3: 257-337.*

7. *da Silva, Denise Ferreira. 2015. "Before Man: Sylvia Wynter's Rewriting of the Modern Episteme." In Sylvia Wynter on Being Human As Praxis, by Katherine McKittrick, 99. Durham: Duke University Press.*

8. *Hall, Stuart. 1999. "Whose Heritage? Un-settling 'The Heritage', Re-imagining the Post-nation." Accessed 04 June 2022. Whose Heritage? Un-settling 'The Heritage', Re-imagining the Post-nation by Stuart Hall – Reading the periphery.org*

9. *La Berge, Leigh Claire. 2019. Wages Against Artworks: Decommodified Labor and the Claims of Socially Engaged Art. Durham: Duke University Press.*

10. *Steyerl, Hito. 2009. "The Institution of Critique (2006)." In Institutional Critique an Anthology of Artists' Writing, by Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, 490. Cambridge MA: MIT.*

11. *Szreder, Kuba. 2021. The ABC of the Projectariat: Living and working in a Precarious Art World. Manchester: Manchester University Press.*

12. *Stakemeier, Kerstin, and Marina Vishmidt. 2016. Reproducing Autonomy Work, Money, Crisis & Contemporary Art. London : Mute Publishing.*

13. *Butler, Patrick . 2022. Schools and libraries face huge cuts after soaring costs create £1.7bn shortfall. June 17. Accessed June 18, 2022. https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/jun/17/emergency-council-cuts-feared-after-higher-costs-create-17bn-shortfall.*

    *Davies, Gareth, Emma Youle, Charles Boutaud, and Hazel Sheffield. 2019. Revealed: The Thousands Of Public Spaces Lost To The Council Funding Crisis. March 04. Accessed June 05, 2022. https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/sold-from-under-you-investigation_*

14. *Charnley, Kim. 2021. Sociopolitical Aesthetics Art, Crisis and Neoliberalism. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 150.*

15. *Prottas, Nathaniel. 2020. "Interview with Nora Sternfeld, Author of Das Radikaldemokratische Museum." Journal of Museum Education 45:2, 212.*

## *Adi Lerer*

Adi is a curator. Her research focuses on methods of socially engaged curatorial practices in public funded museums and is concerned with how reflexive socially engaged methods can be integrated into the fabric of museum structures.

In 2019 she completed an MA in Exhibition Studies at Liverpool John Moores University and in September 2021 she began her PhD in Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths, researching the utility of socially engaged curatorial activities in museums. In 2019, Adi curated the engagement project 'Me. You. Them. Everybody', collaborating with British Red Cross Merseyside. This was followed by an invitation by Tate Liverpool to curate engagement projects for refugees and asylum seekers in Liverpool, and the current iteration 'Home from Home'.

Her practice is informed by her background in performance and previous roles as project coordinator at the British Council and the National Gallery-London, which contributes to her understanding of cultural institution's structures.

# *ANNA FRANCIS*

## A One Hundred Year Plan: The Portland Inn Project.

# Over the past 20 years our neighbourhood has been condemned...

... then reprieved, and also variously described as 'not fit for purpose', 'hard-to-reach', 'deprived', 'underprivileged', 'undeserved', and most recently 'left behind'. These unhelpful terms have the effect of creating a feeling of hopelessness for our community, and a sense that we are not in control of our own destiny or how we are represented.

## The background

The neighbourhood where The Portland Inn Project is based, is an estate of around 500 terraced houses. We are an extremely multi-cultural neighbourhood, but sadly we score poorly across the indices of deprivation in terms of low educational attainment, high unemployment, high crime, low incomes etc.

In 2002, along with many other Midland and Northern neighbourhoods, the estate was earmarked for demolition as part of the Government Housing Renewal scheme, 'Pathfinder.' Pathfinder was designed to improve the housing stock in areas of low housing demand. In some areas like ours, the process to rebuild had not taken place, and indeed as was the case in the Portland St Area, demolition was some way off. This left a fractured community, with boarded up properties across all of the streets, with owner-occupiers living next door to problem properties.

In 2013, the City Council who owned 35 properties across the neighbourhood announced the £1 home scheme as a bid to revive and repair the area. This focused on buildings as a solution, but although new £1 homeowners were expected to 'contribute to community development,' no resource was allocated to considering what this might look like in practice.

The Portland Inn Project grew out of a context then, where top-down decision making at a national and local scale had first seen the neighbourhood condemned, then reprieved, but in neither case had the community of the area been included in the decision-making processes that would affect their lives. Our work has emphasised space for community members in the area to be involved in decision making that affects them, building priorities together for how to make life better in an area with plenty of residual problems, and as many potential gifts to be celebrated.

When The Portland Inn Project began to work with Artist Beekeeper Andrea Ku in January 2021, our neighbourhood—like the rest of the world—had been through almost a year of some of the most unprecedented and challenging circumstances, but in the middle of that difficult time, some community members had found a new appreciation of the small backyards at the back of our terraced properties as an important private outdoor space and extra room for our two-up-two-down homes.

As a result of this new-found interest, plus the knowledge that a large-scale housing development was planned for a neighbouring brownfield, the community were beginning to think about first mapping our local ecology, with a view to planning interventions to support biodiversity.

## Mapping ecologies

Initial questions Andrea asked included: *'What do people like about gardening or the outdoors, what would a 100 Year Plan for the Portland Street area include,'* and *'how do you think the community and garden will look in 2121?'*

Through physical gardening sessions each week, the community got involved in growing plants from seed, improving the green space where much of our activity takes place, and via drone photography, we were able to gain an overview of how our neighbourhood connects to the wider environment and local green infrastructure.

## What would a 100 Year Plan for the Portland Street area include?

This was useful in demonstrating how greening our small backyard spaces can provide important stepping-stones for wildlife to move through the neighbourhood, from one green space to another. Andrea talked to the community about seeing our backyards as a buffet for pollinators to visit on their way to the larger green spaces. Drone footage enabled us to gain an overview of the neighbourhood, to see where the green parts are, but also the physical distance

enabled us to gain perspective, about how we connect up to outlying areas, enabling us to feel less marooned in our small community island and more connected to the wider city, and then out to the world.

As a result of Covid, we were—like most small communities and organisations—dealing with so much uncertainty. One result of this was that thinking ahead to the next month or next year felt almost impossible, as we found ourselves in survival mode. Conversely, however, the invitation to jump ahead and think about what might be happening in one hundred years' time created a space of respite—a sense that beyond the pandemic there would be a future, and that far from being a time of stasis, there may be things we could be doing and planning for now that could have an impact in the future. The notion of a 100-year plan lifted us out of crisis management and enabled us to think about our place in history, and to feel empowered to move forwards again.

## Planning the garden

During lockdown, one of the places I visited on a weekly basis with my two young children was the nearby Trentham Estate, designed by Capability Brown. We loved to explore the different parts of the garden; the wooded area where the foxgloves appear in Late Spring, and the hillside close to the HaHa where the giant redwoods tower above you, giving a full sense of the history of the place. There was also the formal Italian Gardens with the tunnel of Rose Arches where, in high summer, you can stop and smell individual rose blooms.

Something that has always inspired me about Brown's landscapes is that they can be understood as a method of time travel. Brown would not live to see the outcome of the groundworks he put in place nor the trees he was planting grown to full height. Instead, he was designing these landscapes for us, in the belief and hope that the results would be enjoyed by future generations.

One of my favourite quotes about gardening speaks to this idea: *'To plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow.'* (It sounds as though it could have been said by Capability Brown, but was, in fact, Audrey Hepburn!)

Our project as a Landscape Garden
In considering a 100-year plan, we have begun to think more like Capability Brown. We have become aware that our project, just like Brown's Landscape Gardens, requires that we attend to the individual

# *TO PLANT A GARDEN IS TO BELIEVE IN TOMORROW.*

moments—like smelling the rose—just as much as the overview of time and space and the full layout of the garden. For our community members, sometimes all they may experience of the project is a moment with the rose. They may never see the full design, and they may not want to, but to some extent, those individual moments are as important as the big picture.

Thinking about the project in terms of landscape gardening has been critical in helping us to find perspective in what sometimes feels like an overwhelming amount of work and need. Like a garden, we can develop the landscape of our project piece by piece. Change and development—just like the making of a garden—is incremental and iterative, and while we can make plans and work on particular areas, the woods or the hillside, there are also external and unforeseen factors that mean that what we intend to happen may not always be what happens.

## Our garden

Here is some of what we have learned about our garden, through thinking about the 100-year plan.

The work The Portland Inn Project has been doing in the neighbourhood since 2016 has enabled us to do a lot of the groundworks that our garden needs. But like all growing places, the job does not end with the groundwork. Gardens are never finished; they are living spaces and must be continually nurtured. Like most gardens too, the work cannot be done all at once, and some parts may need to be revisited and looked after year on year, while others may almost look after themselves, growing slowly and steadily like the redwood.

When it comes to choosing plants for our garden, the annuals are the exhibitionists. The Busy-Lizzies and Begonias shout for attention and can be relied upon to create an immediate and impressive display, however, once their relatively short-lived flush has passed, they die off quickly and have to be taken up and discarded. Perennials, on the other hand, come in many shapes and sizes, and you can usually find a perennial to suit most contexts in the garden.

The best thing though, of course, is that if you choose carefully and find the right plant for your aspect, they will come back year on year, without too much extra investment from you.

Then there are the self-seeders. What is pleasing here is that you might have one pot of calendula in one place, and then for many years after find it springing up unexpectedly in all areas of your garden. Nasturtiums, for example, are particularly easy to grow for novice gardeners, with their unusual circular leaf and cheerful orange flower, they can build confidence in the methods of gardening. They also work well in a salad, and with a little extra care, you can harvest the seeds, so that everyone in the community can have a share before long.

In the next few years we aim to plant trees in our garden too, and have begun to think about what a community orchard might offer to an area like ours where food poverty is a considerable concern, particularly access to healthy food.

The 100-year plan then, can be a physical and geographical plan for our community landscape, but it works just as well as a concept of change over time. Our garden is an ongoing work.

## *Anna Francis*

**theportlandinnproject.com**

Anna Francis is an artist and researcher whose work aims to create space to discuss and reframe city resources, through participatory art interventions.

She creates situations for herself, the public and other artists to explore places differently. In recent years the interventions which Anna has worked on focus on the city of Stoke-on-Trent, and use an action research process to recognise untapped resources, plan responses to disused sites in the city, take action to change the way these sites are viewed, and potentially, make changes, which can be temporary and sometimes permanent. Through this, Anna aims to gain an understanding of the role of artists, arts organisations and communities in the development of places.

Anna is Associate Professor of Fine Art and Social Practice at Staffordshire University, and a Director at AirSpace Gallery, and Co-Director at The Portland Inn Project, where she collaborates with Rebecca Davies and the Community of the Portland Street Area.'. Born in Canterbury, Kent, she first moved to Stoke-on-Trent in 1997, and now lives there permanently with her partner and two children.

# *EMMA LILWALL*

## Deeds Not Words

# In the wake of the events surrounding Sarah Everard in 2021, this project connects agencies to explore modern day suffrage with vulnerable prisoners in a UK prison with reference to site-specific history.

Emma's practice is often situated where the analogue and digital collide. In this collage prisoners use QR codes which link to pages relevant to the project.

The collage is intended as an invitation for the non-incarcerated to explore the digital presence of the project. You are invited to open the pages and explore, in direct contrast to the analogue non-digital world in which the works were created.

**All artwork, words, and collage were made by artists incarcerated at HMP Bristol. Thanks to partnerships with:**

HMP Bristol, Weston College, Bristol Civic Society, Inclusion and Diversity Team - HMP Bristol, Upfest Urban Paint Festival, Paintsmiths Design, Rozalita, Bristol City Library, Bristol Museums and Art Galleries, Lucienne Boyce - Author the Bristol Suffragette, Bristol City Councillors: Helen Holland, Nicola Beech and Asha Craig, The 5 suffragettes imprisoned at HMP Bristol, The imprisoned artists involved within this project

## Untitled 2

Through the crimson fog,
A lash strikes.
Step closer to suffrage,
Arsonists ignite.
Sentinels of the state,
Thwart her night.
Sat in her cell,
She's done for the night.

Time for round two,
Smash the glass.
Sequestered in solidarity,
No food, no gas.
Can't fight the tube,
Stay strong lass.
One day you'll have it,
The women's vote, en masse.

James

## Untitled

The weight of my actions,
Come with heavy consequence,
Responsibilities cannot be taken lightly,
Buoyant with the commitment to change,
Rise up.

Carl



BRISTOL CIVIC SOCIETY

**Theresa Garnett**

1888 – 1966

**Suffragette**

Imprisoned here in 1909

HMP Bristol

Weston College

&

The Bristol Civic Society

Invite you to the unveiling of

The Theresa Garnett Blue Plaque

&

'The Horfield 5 Commemorative mural'

Created by prisoners at HMP Bristol

( viewed through interactive QR Code )

Friday 1st October – 2pm

HMP Bristol, Cambridge Rd, BS7 8PS.

## *Emma Lilwall*

**emmalilwall.com**

Emma Lilwall (she/her) is a neurodivergent socially engaged artist / creative producer and educator currently practicing within the criminal justice system. Through creating and facilitating a non-hegemonic physical learning space she gives voice to some of the most vulnerable male prisoners in the UK.

Her practice actively addresses and disrupts inequalities within the prison by elevating the voices and visibility of specific individuals and groups. Emma aims to make comment and challenge preconceptions through engagement with isolated and marginalised individuals and communities. Her work frequently uses digital technology as a mode of communication to present work which contrasts with the DIY format that the place of production demands.

Emma has performed at CRiSAP's Sound: Gender: Feminism: Activism symposium, was awarded a fellowship with Spike Island, Bristol, presented at Koestler Arts Symposium, and is currently working with the horse drawn traveller community creating a DIY travelling mesh net.

# *GIL MUALEM-DORON*

## The Socially Engaged Art Salon: from a living room to a room for living

# *In the arts things get said in ways in which they can't get said in any other domain.*

## *Stuart Hall* [1]

1. *Stuart Hall, 'Living with Difference: Stuart Hall in conversation with Bill Schwarz', Soundings 37, 2007, p.153.*

# A few months after I was born in South London, my parents decided to immigrate back to Israel.

*'England was neither the place I felt I belonged, nor was safe,'* said my mum.

It was the early seventies. The National Front was becoming England's fourth largest party, and while my parents were offered British passports, the words of the 'Rivers of Blood' speech strongly echoed in the air.

***IT IS NIGHT.***
***I AM THREE YEARS OLD.***
***ALARM SOUNDING.***
***I GET UP AND SLEEPILY WALK TO THE LIVING ROOM.***
***MY PARENTS GRAB MY LITTLE SISTER.***
***WE RUSH DOWN THE STAIRCASE.***
***WE STEP INTO THE BUILDING'S BOMB SHELTER.***
***OUR NEIGHBOURS ARE ALREADY IN A CIRCLE,***
***GATHERED AROUND A TRANSISTOR RADIO.***
***IT IS OCTOBER 1973.***

I think that from this point on, home, for me, has never really felt like a safe place. It was the shelter with its solid, cool, damp, bare concrete walls which I leaned into. And the communion of strangers sitting silently in a circle in the dark.

## Socially Engaged Art Salon

It might be that if I hadn't had this experience—or perhaps you could say 'trauma'—of having to find home in the company of strangers, The Socially Engaged Art Salon (SEAS) wouldn't have been established. SEAS was also born out of necessity to create a space that is welcoming and safe for artists and visitors who, for various reasons, find themselves excluded from, or strangers to the art scene in the UK. And when I say 'find themselves', this includes me as well, a 40+, neurodiverse, gay, mixed-race migrant from the Global South, with a very strange family name, who never studied art professionally. Working without the network and connections that such studies bring, and producing social and political artwork (some deemed too extreme, verging on being illegal), the chances of being noticed or exhibited are almost non-existent.

One of first opportunities I actually received in the UK, that ended up contributing to the creation of SEAS, was from Counterpoints Arts who worked specifically with migrants and refugees for a group exhibition at the Turner Contemporary. The call was restricted to the South East (excluding London) and through participating in the exhibition I met several other socially engaged artists from Brighton. This small network was the basis of the first exhibition and the launch of SEAS in the small living room of mine and my partner's home in the heart of Brighton. For about a year, the space was not only a platform for marginalised artists but also for many visitors who wouldn't go, for various reasons, to mainstream galleries or museums. The domestic setting, this intimacy in a former servant's home, with the dogs on the sofa and music in the background, and the offer of free Baklava and tea, brought visitors in regularly and frequently.

The last exhibition at the actual salon took place in 2017 where about 90 people arrived for the opening. The small living room was packed with people, two camera men from the local media, the Mayor of London and his entourage, four dogs, and a choir singing in the kitchen. With no room for even one more chihuahua, half of the visitors had to stand outside to dry in the sunshine, just to face my ninety-year-old neighbour, a UKIP supporter, who shouted, 'this is not the Middle East: you cannot stand like that in the street'.

The stress of hosting the exhibition at home, with all its implications (the hostility

# *A SPACE THAT IS WELCOMING AND SAFE FOR ARTISTS WHO FIND THEMSELVES EXCLUDED FROM THE ART SCENE IN THE UK.*

from the neighbour and another time when the salon window was smashed in the middle of the night) as well as the growth of visitors led me to re-launch SEAS at the Black and Minorities Ethnic Community Partnership (BMECP) Centre. After a few years there, SEAS expanded again into the new The Ledward Centre (an LGBTQ+ community centre), occasionally exhibiting at Brighton's Jubilee Library.

None of these spaces are traditional or exclusive art spaces. SEAS' main objectives are exhibiting the works of LGBTQ+ and BPOC [Black & People of Colour] artists, artists with disabilities, self-taught artists and/or from working class background; artists who create work through social and/or political practices. Some of the exhibitions that SEAS has produced were related to specific occasions or events, including LGBTQ+ History Month, Refugee Week and Black History Month.

## The Master's Tools

One might ask why SEAS has kept the traditional exhibition format as its core activity if most of the artists who we work with are socially engaged? As Audre Lorde said, 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house'. For artists who work with social practices, exhibitions might be seen as a 'master's tool' —a format that suits more traditional ways of creating and engaging with the arts. Some of the products of social art might be more challenging to showcase in a conventional gallery setting because these spaces have deep and problematic roots in colonialism, to the capitalist market and the commercialisation of art.

One might also ask why socially and politically engaged artists still rely on the exhibition format in a physical space and do not use other spaces such as the internet, social media or other publications to showcase their work or do away all together with the need to 'exhibit'. However, as Duncombe and Lambert argued in The Art of Activism, the Master 'has some slick power tools. These are particularly well suited for working on the master's construction sites of the mass media, commercial culture, and political spectacle [and I would add here the museum and the gallery G.M.D]—sites in which we sometimes need to be able to work' Yet, they add, 'we can't simply adopt the tactics and strategies of our enemies; we need to adapt them to our goals and, above all, our ethics' (2021:306).

SEAS has been doing just that. So, it wasn't a complete surprise that when we exhibited pro-Palestinian works, or posters from the 'Kill the Bill' campaign, or work that graphically depicted a trans person's transition, or work that superimposed Boris Jonson's face onto Da Vinci's Vitruvian Man with the title, in Arabic, 'Ass Face', we were attacked. These attacks included a Neo-Nazi raid on one of our Refugee Week online events, the removal of LGBTQ+ works that deemed too explicit for display and zero coverage from local right-wing media, amongst other things. At the same time, the places we exhibit, the themes we choose, the artists we work with not only brings a more just and diverse representation to artists but also engenders engagement with the communities who are often described as 'hard to reach'.

Alongside the exhibitions, SEAS has produced community art events, commissioned social work projects, hosted the SAN hub, and delivered

artists development programmes. We are currently working on a piece of EDI research commissioned by the local council, an art therapy programme for artists in response to the difficulties experienced as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, and a series of free creative workshops. All of these activities began in a tiny living room on a dead-end street in the heart of Brighton.

## The limits of inclusion... or why Narcissus must leave the swamp

'Instead of making excuses, denying statistics, or shying away from inequalities of gender, race, and sexuality, we must face these issues head-on in order to come up with strategies and solutions that will guarantee equal opportunity and exposure. With a little more energy and action, the creation of a just art world does not have to be a people's dream'. — Afua Hirsch (2018:225)

My own and other BPOC/LGBTQ/ migrants' lived experience at the edges of the art world, as well as the marginalisation of socially engaged practices in the local art scene at the time were the main motivation for the creation of SEAS. Despite the calls and attempts to change this, for example by the Art Council England's The Case for Diversity, we are still far from seeing adequate representation of minority groups. In some ways, the art scene has become even less equal due to austerity measures, diverting funds to 'priority cities' and rural areas and away from majors cities where the majority of BPOC, migrants and LGBTQ people live. At the same time, art education cuts and the need for big art institute to increase visitors numbers results in mainstream art and big-name artists (mostly white, heterosexual and dead].

(In connection with the last issue it is worth noting the fascinating, and honest statement on the issue of diversity by The Guardian's critic, Jonathan Jones: 'The reason there are no great female artists is, in short, because of men like me. Art criticism defines the lofty beaks of the canon, and it is, let's say, a macho trade. I'd go further. I think to feel a passion for an artist...involves a kind of deep identification, a sense of meeting your double, the artist who speaks for you'.

Alison Green who mentioned Jones's confession in her book When Artists Curate argued that to remedy this 'we need more women critics who can break

***INSTEAD OF SHYING AWAY FROM INEQUALITIES WE MUST FACE THESE ISSUES HEAD-ON.***

into that old-boy network' and that art standards should be 'other than a set of standards made by men for men - a paradigm that must be dismantled before we can move forward' (2018:220).

I agree with Green's comments but I also believe that Jones's confession portrays an underlying cause for the lack of EDI in the arts which has to do not only with artistic preferences but also with cultural preferences that are rooted in life experiences and education.

How and why might a person from an hegemonic position—white, middle class, native, hetero cis male— who is the product of the narrow, Eurocentric, yet-to-be decolonized English education system have an interest in art that is based on life experiences, cultures, history who he is not familiar with? And if this is true to an art specialist like Jones, what can we expect from the majority of people who have not benefited from an arts education and may have little interest in the arts and culture, even less that of those they view as Other to them? And finally, if art institutions—both commercial and public—feel the need to and/or are required to cater to the majority's interest, what are the chances for the art of Others to be showcased there?

Maura Reilly, in Curatorial Activism Towards An Ethics of Curating, argued that until there is equality, there is still a pressing need for spaces that cater for 'Other art'. Such spaces 'allow that art to flourish despite the dominant culture's ostensible lack of interest. If mainstream curators [and I would add also the public—

G.M-D] can be encouraged to visit these alternative spaces, new knowledge can be gained, and inclusion will become a more likely possibility' (2018:224). I think that this is true not only in regard to 'Other art' as art of marginalized sectors such as BPOC, LGBTQ+ people, people with disabilities and artists from working class backgrounds, but also art practices such as social and political art, collaborative and participatory art etc. SEAS, I believe, has been a platform for such art and artist to gain visibility and to thrive.

## In conclusion

'This may be what is most at stake in the most current discussion of curating by artists: the de-skilling, de-professionalizing and democratising of curating for everyday use, and the coincident liberating of creativity from the historical definition of art and the institutions that guard it'.—Alison Green (2018:12)

EDI is the raison d'etre for the creation of SEAS and as such its curatorial stand is based on institutional critique and decolonial practices. This informs the selection of the artists we work with, our policy of open calls and proposals, our exhibition themes, the spaces in which SEAS operates, the charities and other organisations we collaborate with, the funding structure we have and most importantly the communities we work with. It is also important to stress that SEAS is an artist-led organisation and most of our exhibitions have been curated by artists rather than professional curators, leading to different curatorial processes and outcomes. All of these are made transparent on our extensive website and were discussed in our artist's development programme in 2020, Decolonizing Art and Curatorial Practices, led by researcher and curator Susuana Amoah.

As a result of SEAS' structure, objectives and the people involved, most of the work SEAS has exhibited or commissioned is social and political, and some are also created via participatory and collaborative practices. Many of the works are reflections and negotiations of lived experiences. SEAS never charges artists for exhibiting and, if possible, pays the exhibiting artists. We also cover all costs associated with the exhibition, including printing, installation, and the rental of the space. In order to include works by artists who cannot physically come to install exhibitions—whether because of disabilities, distance and/or finance—the SEAS team installs and de-rigs all exhibitions.

Staying loyal to our origins, we still strategically exhibit in non-traditional art spaces, preferring instead places where the communities we work with can access and feel comfortable in. This is probably one of the key elements that makes our art more accessible. We also do a lot to support all citizens to come and see our exhibitions, with a special emphasis on so-called 'hard to reach' communities. One example of such an endeavour was the series of exhibitions we conducted during the Covid-19 lockdowns. Whilst everywhere was closed, the BMECP was open once a week to deliver a food bank programme, and with this knowledge, we curated exhibitions for the foodbank benefactors. Knowing how difficult the lockdown was for children, especially from lower socio-economic families, we included art activities in the foodbank parcels.

Finally, we are not shy of risk taking, tackling controversial issues or showing politically contested (or otherwise explicit) work to tackle issues of racial discrimination, the hostile environment against refugees and migrants, transphobia, domestic abuse and human rights issues in the UK and abroad.

We have looked at homophobia in Commonwealth countries as well as the Palestinian struggle that, for the large part, have been the results of Britain's colonial past.

We know, in the deepest sense, that our art practice and its outcomes is informed by our lived experiences of displacement, of marginalisation, of trauma, of vulnerability, of resistance, of struggle to keep our heritage, of loss, of care, of intersectionality, and of dreams. This affects the ways we create art, the subjects we choose, the practices we invent or utilise, the people we engage with and the ways we engage with them, the ethics we adhere to, and the reason we chose to make art in the first place. SEAS believes that EVERYBODY, and particularly the communities we address, deserve to have the opportunity to engage with art and artists.

## *Gil Mualem-Doron*

**gmdart.com**

Gil Mualem-Doron is a Brighton/UK-based transdisciplinary award-winning artist developing and using socially engaged practices. Their work often investigates issues such as queer practices, diasporic spaces, social and racial justice, and transcultural aesthetics, informed by the artist's lived experiences as a migrant, mixed-race, gay, neurodivergent artist.  A recurrent theme of Gil's work is placemaking or 'taking place' through interventions in public spaces, large scale installations and participatory projects.

Gil is the founder of Socially Engaged Art Salon (SEAS CIC) which promotes artists from under-represented sectors, especially BME, LGBTQ+, migrant and refugees and artists with disabilities. SEAS has produced more than thirty group and solo exhibitions, working with hundreds of artists from the UK as well as artists from the Global South. The exhibitions also included collaborations with several museums and institutes among them The LGBTQ Centre New York, Cambridge University Archive (USA) and Preus Museum (Norway) and Greatmore Studios (South Africa).

# *GILL CRAWSHAW*

## Don’t call it therapy

# We are DISrupt, a new collective of disabled artists in Leeds.

We have come together to work for change and to have a collective voice. We aim to support disabled artists with their professional development, to promote disabled artists' work and to tackle ableism and disabling barriers in the arts.

We've put this in our manifesto so that people know what we stand for, as well as our aims and plans for the future. Many of our aims are particularly relevant to social art and discussions of equality, diversity and inclusion.

We included references to the social model of disability and the disability arts movement because these are important to us. Ultimately, what we want is for disabled artists to be taken seriously, treated fairly and recognised as equals.

## The social model of disability

The social model of disability is a way of thinking about disability that places it firmly within social structures.

The way society is organised has failed to take account of the needs of people with impairments, people who are neurodivergent, or those living with chronic illnesses. The social model says that people are therefore disabled by a range of physical, organisational and attitudinal barriers. These can lead to disabled people being excluded—from education, work, art and culture. The intersections of, for example, race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation and class impact on these barriers even more.

The social model dismisses the idea that disability is purely an individual problem that must be cured or pitied. Instead, identifying and dismantling disabling barriers is a collective responsibility: it's absolutely the business of social art practitioners.

DISrupt and other groups of disabled people are a valuable resource who can help organisations and practitioners to think about accessibility and inclusion. It's certainly important to meet individual disabled people's access needs, and more people are using access riders[1] to make this easier. But this needs to be coupled with a strategic and anticipatory approach to accessibility, which is where the social model of disability comes in.

There's lots of information about the social model online. The short statement[2] by Access, Power and Visibility, which calls for a reimagining of social structures, sums it up well. For more in-depth information, we recommend the information and resources produced by Shape Arts[3] and Unlimited[4].

Disabled people continue to discuss, develop and expand their understanding of the social model to keep it relevant and useful. And the same goes for disability arts.

***DISABILITY ARTS IS A TOOL FOR SOCIAL CHANGE.***


IT IS NOT FRIVOLOUS FOR US TO DEMAND ACCESS TO ART, TO RECREATION, TO COMMUNITY
DISrupt
You DON'T KNOW WHAT YOURE MISSING!
DISRUPT
NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US!
DISRUPT
A LITTLE REMINDER NOT TO LEAVE US STUCK OUTSIDE!
ART FOR ALL?
DISRUPT
WE SHALL NOT BE REMOVED!
DISRUPT
ONE small ask
ART FOR ALL?
NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US!
DISRUPT
THE SPREAD OF CORONAVIRUS
Scan this QR code with your NHS COVID-19 App to check-in
Accessibility: a tick-box for funding??
DISrupt
DOWNLOAD THE NHS COVID-19 APP
App Store
Google Play

# *DISRUPT THE BARRIERS THAT PREVENT DISABLED ARTISTS FROM TAKING PART EQUALLY*

## Disability arts

Disability arts evolved as the creative wing of the disabled people's movement in the UK in the 1980s and 1990s. It was political, rooted in the social model, defined as art by disabled artists that reflected the experience of being a disabled person. The movement wanted to differentiate disability art from art that involved disabled people but was led by non-disabled artists, or from art by disabled people that didn't have disability as its subject matter.

Some people argued that any art made by a disabled artist was bound to reflect their experience of being disabled in some way. And what about artists who worked in equal partnership with non-disabled artists? Over the years, interpretations of disability arts have multiplied.[5]

DISrupt is proud to continue the legacy of the disability arts movement. Disability arts continues to be an effective way for disabled artists to challenge misconceptions and prejudicial thinking about disabled people. It provides alternatives to limiting and negative stereotypes and enables disabled artists to share their view of the world - with other disabled people as well as with non-disabled audiences. Disability arts is a tool for social change.

This doesn't mean that all members of DISrupt make art about disability, and some are ambivalent about being labelled disabled artists. DISrupt, however, being entirely led by disabled artists with a mission to fight ableism and to improve access in the art world, is most definitely a disability arts project.

## Give disabled artists the recognition they deserve

Disabled artists are likely to be pigeonholed and excluded from opportunities due to ableist attitudes and low expectations.

These misconceptions occur throughout society, including in the arts and even within social practice. We are more likely to be viewed as participants for community arts projects, rather than practising artists. We're fed up of it!

In the DISrupt manifesto we point out that we do not make art as a hobby or for therapy. We know that art can be good for well-being and is an effective way for people to connect with others, but DISrupt is not an arts and health group. The legacy of arts activities that have been broadly labelled as occupational therapy, along with the current focus on arts and health, don't necessarily do disabled artists any favours. They reinforce assumptions that our work is neither critically engaged nor of a high standard, which could not be further from the truth.

There are loads of disabled artists across the country making original, exciting and ambitious work. But disabling barriers and ableist attitudes mean that we rarely see this work in galleries or on stage or screen. And there aren't nearly enough disabled artists in staff teams and professional networks, in positions to influence this, in the cultural sector[6].

We are serious about our artistic practices and serious about the need to disrupt the barriers that prevent disabled artists from taking part equally in arts and culture.

We want to work with anyone who shares our aims. With the goal of reimagining social relationships and structures, that surely includes colleagues in the field of social art.



1. *Access documents for artists, Clements, L., Hattrick, A., and Rose, L. (2018), accessed 13.12.22 https://www.accessdocsforartists.com/*

2. *Access, Power & Visibility (2021), accessed 13.12.22 http://www.accesspowervisibility.com/*

3. *Social model of disability, Shape Arts (n.d.), accessed 13.12.22 https://www.shapearts.org.uk/news/social-model-of-disability*

4. *Resources, Unlimited (n.d.), accessed 13.12.22 https://weareunlimited.org.uk/resources/*

5. *'Are we in an era, post Disability Art?', Hambrook, C. & Wheatley, T. (2018), accessed 13.12.22 https://disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/are-we-in-an-era-post-disability-art/*

6. *'Equality, Diversity and the Creative Case: A Data Report, 2019-20, Arts Council England (2021), accessed 13.12.22 https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication/equality-diversity-and-creative-case-data-*

## Excerpt from the DISrupt manifesto

**What we will do:**

We will support and encourage disabled artists and their art practice.

We will provide a safe space for disabled artists to discuss their experiences of discrimination and ableism, offering peer support and signposting to other organisations for advice.

We will provide a forum for disabled artists to share their work to get feedback from each other.

We will share information with disabled artists about opportunities, commissions, professional development and exhibitions.

We will promote the work of disabled artists through our own communication channels and by working with partner organisations.

We will celebrate the diversity of disabled artists. This diversity enriches our collective.

We will create opportunities for disabled artists by seeking funding for commissions, exhibitions, professional development, and to support collaborations within our collective and with other partners.

We will promote best practice in the arts by developing relationships with arts and cultural organisations, acting as a critical friend to offer information and support about disability equality, access and working with disabled artists.

We will use our collective voice to advocate for disabled artists and to fight for representation in the shaping of inclusive and accessible arts and culture in Leeds.

There can be nothing about us without us.

*disruptartsleeds.co.uk*

## *Gill Crawshaw*

**disabilityarts.online/blog/author/gill-crawshaw/**

Gill is a curator who draws on her experience of disability activism to organise exhibitions and events which highlight issues affecting disabled people.

Gill's curatorial practice includes writing and research, along with exhibitions that have addressed issues including the representation of disabled artists and access to arts and culture (Possible All Along, 2020), charity (Piss on Pity, 2019), and cuts to welfare and public spending (Shoddy, 2016). Gill is one of the founders of DISrupt, a new collective of disabled artists in Leeds.

**SAFEDI project**

# *JARSQUAD*

Re-igniting what is already there

In February 2021, JarSquad was one of six artist groups commissioned by SAFEDI, a UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)-funded EDI Fellowship. The brief was to work with participant-collaborators and arts and cultural organisations, whilst reflecting on equality, diversity and inclusion and policymaking.

In the following conversation, Amanda Ravetz (AR) and Patrick Campbell (PC) from the SAFEDI research team speak to JarSquad's co-animators Carmen Wong (CW), Rachel Dobbs (RD) and Tess Wilmott (TW) about JarSquad's interweaving of social practice art, interdependence and care in communally making jams and preserves.

The exchange touches on becoming social artists, the origins of JarSquad, how squadding relates to belonging, inclusion and care, and how permaculture principles have inspired the way the group thinks about design, language and JarSquad's evolving practice.

**PC**

**Could you start by telling us a little bit about your backgrounds, and your individual careers? And how you got interested in social art practice?**

TW

I wanted to go to art school, but never did. My father was very against it when I was a teenager. My great uncle was the arty person in our family who influenced me. I didn't go to college, but I did end up having quite an intense apprenticeship with my ex, who used to do cold-cast bronzes. I set up on my own in 1994 with a business called Quintessence.

The next thing which was very influential was permaculture, and that transformed what I did. It got me working as a social and environmental activist. I set up Dig for Devonport in 2008. Working with people who aren't necessarily gardeners, we were using the creative side of things to get them involved. I've been doing it ever since and have been teaching people to forage via what I call the art of Identification for foragers. You stop people being blind to plants, using art and the way that artists see to help open their eyes and recognise plants and forage safely.

CW:

A summary of my background would be growing up in Singapore, a bit of a theatre nerd. That led to an undergraduate degree, swapping pre-medicine for theatre, film and German, followed by founding an experimental theatre company in Washington DC. In the UK it might have been identified as live art, and was influenced by a dance choreographer that I met when I was living in Berlin. I ran it for ten years.

Fast forward to an MA in 2014, after closing the company down, I found my art taking the form of social practice. I was already practising different methodologies like sensory ethnography in my work with food, which is a huge passion. I'm still learning how to raise the politics of food into the work. I haven't necessarily succeeded in a loud politic, but I think it has been a gentle, quieter activism. JarSquad has been a really good experimental ground to test some of these ideas and politics, reject some of them, and maybe try other things with a bit more courage and bravery.

RD
My career in art began when I studied art at university in the early 2000s. At the time, a lot of the focus was on public arts: rather than a white-walled studio, the context was the world around you. I started interacting with people and making things that were prompts for conversations. When I graduated, I started to collaborate with a friend as Low Profile. A lot of the work in the first ten years was to do with survival, reflecting on being two young women, living independently in the world, encountering new situations. Alongside this we started to make badges and books that might look like merchandise. The badges are often about encouraging a conversation, encouraging somebody to ask the wearer about their badge. They can lead to people rethinking or reconsidering things that are overlooked.

As both Tess and Carmen were saying, something that's has driven my art practice is learning how to pay attention, how to focus in on very small details, things about a situation or an experience, and use those to make artwork.

**AR**
**Let's talk about JarSquad. How did you come together in the first place?**

RD
I used to live in a house that had a massive apple tree at the back and the apples would come every year. There were bath-loads full of them, too many apples. I would try my hardest to process as many as possible. Tess had been running a permaculture course. I didn't have a place on it but I was watching what people were posting online and one post was about the principles of permaculture. There was a diagram and I saw it unlocking a new way of looking at the world. Observe and interact. Catch and store energy. Harvest things while they're abundant. Obtain a yield. Self regulate, accept feedback, use and value renewables, produce no waste. Design from pattern to detail. I thought this is like a diagram for project making, and life making. And that inspired me thinking about these mountains of apples. As one person, I can never turn them into enough jam.


**Fig 1: JarSquad's "Terms That Serve Us" inspired by the Virtual Care Lab.**

**Fig 2: JarSquad Assembly.**
**Tom and Ian working on turning crab apples into jelly and chutney during a SAFEDI commissioned session.**

CW
So we chanced upon the idea that there were all these surpluses that needed some human effort to transform, divert them from a waste stream. I would make jams out of supermarket stuff as there was a little surplus shop on the boatyard I lived on for a while during COVID. The idea was that over social distance could we keep each other company and tell stories about food.

RD
We were talking about the harvest of different things, and running out of jars and how these are like a unit of currency. I was trying to work out how you could make a gang around jam and chutney. I didn't know whether it was about swapping things, or collecting the jars up. I'd made this little patch that just said JarSquad. It was going to be a reward for people who would join in saving all their jars up.

**AR**
**So how did squadding come into it?**

CW
As a child, me and a friend had a 'gang' where we produced badges and membership cards. I was wondering about the concept of squadding or working in concert together, because for me at the time it was this sense of exclusivity. But as we began to look into it more we drew on the idea of 'squadding' and how it can be about inclusivity. And about branching out and what that means for us.

RD
With this idea of a squad, we would have a togetherness and a way to practice squadding. We create a thing that feels like it could be a boundary, but it's obvious quite quickly that the boundary is very permeable. So it's very easy to be in. And that's quite nice.

**PC**
**What do you do in JarSquad? How does it operate?**

RD
We organise events that we call Assemblies that are open for people to join in. At an Assembly, we bring together surplus food of different kinds that comes from growers, allotments, foraging and from our local community fridge, which is surplus from supermarkets. We gather other useful ingredients like sugar, and spices and vinegar, and equipment, like pots and pans and cookers. We also gather people together to join the squad action in collectively making jam or chutney or preserves of some kind.

CW
Folks enter into a bit of chaos sometimes, because we're in the middle of making, usually, and a lot of things are happening. Based on what we have in store, people might be helping to write labels for previously-made sets of jams or jellies, or chopping up fruit or vegetables that we use on the same day or pop into the freezer.

RD
They might be stirring a giant cauldron of bubbling hot preserve...

CW
They might be helping to sterilise jars...

TW
Depending on what season it is, I try to bring in things that are abundantly available that we can use, or we use what we've been given because somebody has got too much.

I've been working for over fifteen years now, creating abundance in the city, planting apple trees and fruit trees, and getting people doing community gardens and harvesting and trying to distribute it to people and that sort of thing. But this way, some of the abundance can come to the JarSquad. And then instead of somebody taking loads and loads of crab apples and making loads and loads of crab apple jelly, they'll come to JarSquad and help with some of the process in an Assembly. And they'll go away with two or three different things. So the diversity of what you've got, is much, much greater.

**PC**

**So it operates as a kind of an extension of a wider permaculture project, but then it's also dialogical, so people are able to come and meet people and talk and have a sense of companionship?**

TW

Absolutely, there's something about when you're chopping loads of fruit—if you do it in isolation, it can be really boring, but if you're in a group of people, many hands make light work.

RD

There's also this part that is about transaction when we point to the exchange rates that we use. We get people to have a look at this exchange rate that we've suggested, to decide how much to take from our bank of jams, chutneys, pickles, whatever, so they're converting their time, their labour or their ingredients.

**PC**

**When you were talking about your early artistic work, Carmen and Rachel, it was the framing that was the delineation of the artwork, so are there moments when that same artistic framing takes place?**

RD

I think definitely one of the moments of framing is when people are invited to view the JarSquad Exchange Rate to pick which things they'd like to take with them.

CW

It's also like devising together how we co-animate and co-direct JarSquad, I think we're constantly devising with what each of us are bringing. Tess is really great at bringing something in order to continue conversation to keep hands busy. I feel so incredibly lucky in companionship with two other people who know what to do with what people bring.

**AR**

**I was struck by how the story started with bath-loads of fruit that was discarded, uncared for, which is then gathered up into this practice. I wonder what your vision for JarSquad is?**

TW

I'm involved with JarSquad because it is a key part of creating an edible city. In my work with Food Plymouth, we're getting people the growing skills, and we've got 40 Community orchards in Plymouth, and 40 community gardens that don't necessarily overlap. And JarSquad is a catalyst. It doesn't have to be just us three doing it. We can support other groups around the city to set up their own JarSquads. That abundance is being used, but also the skills are being shared and the recipes, and it's empowering people. That's why I'm involved.

RD

The vision I have around it is being able to communicate this model easily enough, so that it's straightforward for other people to start their own. The process of squadding, of getting together to do stuff. When I know I really have succeeded is when I'm not needed anymore. The thing will exist, the model will exist, it will be easy for other people to replicate it and make it happen.

CW

We've been talking about how we might develop an open franchising model for JarSquad and I think absolutely, that can happen. But the hardest thing to do is the animation: how do I (as a co-animator) learn to create spaces that can hold different sorts of people and energies, and extend genuine welcome and have people feel belonging to that space? This is something I don't always get right.

RD

The animation is really hard to replicate. We need a really different type of knowledge. You can't make a recipe for it...and maybe a key part of the squadding is how to learn about and practice sharing responsibility for things, (especially) because it's not something in our daily lives, or work lives, that is encouraged in hierarchical structures. You're actively discouraged from sharing responsibility of care. Yes. It's a tricky part of the mission.

CW
I see empowerment as a result of belonging (even if I'm generally cautious about the concept of 'empowerment'). I love when someone walks into JarSquad 'cold', and they're like, 'what is this?' but it's welcoming, and including them in belonging to this thing where there is potential for their contribution to matter, and that's perhaps where empowerment can happen. So when you feel you have a space in JarSquad, or in any organisation, you might feel, "I can play this game.", You feel competent and able to offer a different perspective, offer your life experience. Because, yeah, this interaction changes not only that individual, it changes the entire group. It's not like this person came in and got changed. No, the whole group got changed, us included. I always walk away from each session with so much learning.

TW
I'm reminded of someone who came to the last Assembly saying 'my house is full of fermentation after coming and seeing you!' He'd known about making fermented food for ages, and it'd all gone away. And suddenly it's come back and it's refreshed. Maybe they go away refreshed and infused and rekindled rather than empowered.

RD
So you're reigniting what was already always there...the power that was always there.

**PC**
**Did being a part of the SAFEDI project bring the questions and issues of empowerment and inclusion more into relief?**

CW
Being part of SAFEDI made us scrutinise these ideas even more and how they show up in practice. All of these things deepen the conversation about how can we provide more framing of our ethos and politics actually, because right now, some ideals we hold are not framed. And it doesn't need to be hurried. I trust the process of this, continuing to find the right resources, and the right timing for these ideas, changes and lessons to be articulated.

Now, for example, we're also thinking of how to price our assemblies, how to make it more equitable with a sliding scale as well as free tickets. And then we're like, oh, how do we make or articulate this sliding scale to be...

RD
...a little personal, more human; and use less administrative and governmental language (so that people don't feel they have to prove need). So rather than a question about income brackets, or 'are you in receipt of Universal Credit?' you might ask through these statements: 'I struggled to cover the cost of living', or 'I struggle every month to like pay my bills'. Right?

CW
When you're trying to price something, the business model way of doing it, is to do your market research to determine how much a thing costs, and how much people might pay for it. So if we're trying to actively divert or find alternatives for that model, we have to consider what kind of language and framing is required to evoke more care that troubles the concept of transaction. In my practices I'm generally interested in what kind of languaging is required, what kind of care is required? So SAFEDI has opened at least two things—a sliding scale and the consent form—for JarSquad to interrogate and infuse greater care in actual practice.

RD
Yeah, and being part of SAFEDI has made us think about the word 'policy'. We had no policies when we went into JarSquad, but we have lots of attitudes, we have lots of practises, and those could be or should be the formation of policy rather than the other way round. So that you're writing down your culture, rather than trying to adapt it into a written document. But those are the hard things to write down. Like when we're talking about how you create a squad that has care in it.

**Fig 3. What do we consent to? JarSquad co-animators with the Plymouth Racial Equality Council's women's group, who chatted with us about consent forms over a bring-and- shared lunch, before an Assembly.**

**PC**

**That makes me think about your diagrams, Rachel. Diagrams are kind of creative practice as they're playful. And what was interesting is that in your diagrams, you were all saying that what was important were the gaps, what wasn't written down. It's that liminal space that I think of when I think of policy, because that would be a flaw or a gap.**

RD

Exactly. That's what I mean. In our current system the belief is that we can't have liminal spaces in policy... but that means that we pretend that it is possible to write everything down. And it's absurd...a policy has an absurdity written into it, because you can never legislate for everything. Never. You know, your legislation would be this big to cover every possible situation, and then something new would happen anyway.

CW

To me, thinking about performance and performativity, it's performing policy, and how do we enact practices of care in a policy that we then actively conduct in Assembly sessions, in our writing up how and why we run, and how we obtain or exchange contributions or consent, or in how we talk about JarSquad...

RD

...how we encourage that replication process. Being able to formulate it clearly, with lots of care and space for growth in learning would be the thing that allows us to replicate things really easily. But it's not as mechanical as that.

TW

And that's similar to permaculture design because every design, even if it's on the same place, or land or whatever, will always be different. You can't standardise a permaculture design.

*AR*

***And that's an interesting way to think about policymaking.***

***As a highly receptive and iterative process.***


Creatively use &
Use edges & value the marginal
Use & value diversity
earth
Use small &
slow solutions
fair share
Integrate rather
than segregate
Design from patterns to details

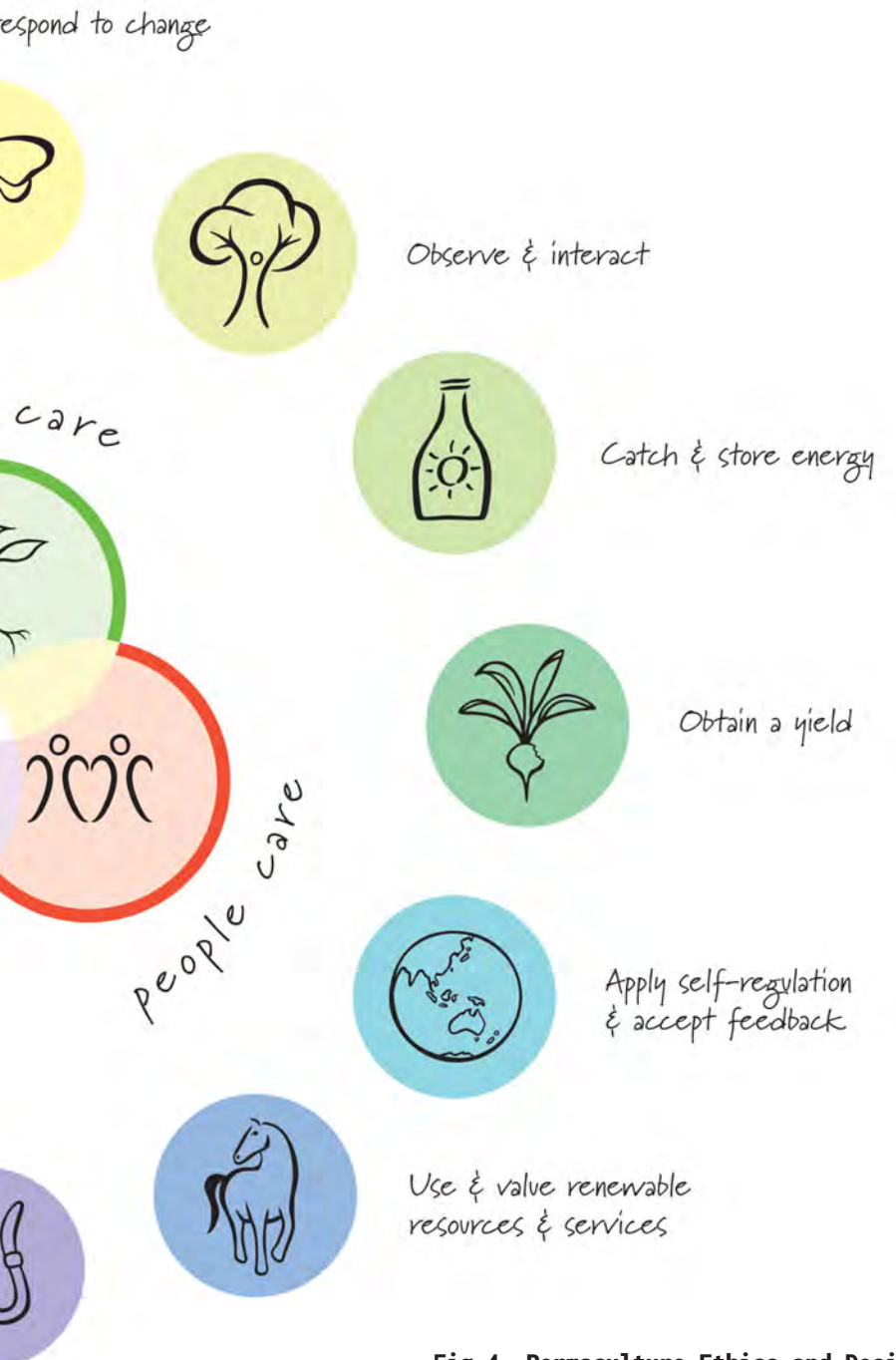



**Fig 4. Permaculture Ethics and Design Principles image,permaculturepriciples.com**

## *Amanda Ravetz*

Amanda Ravetz is a visual anthropologist with research interests and expertise in the interdisciplinary connections between anthropology and art/design; and art, arts infrastructure and social justice.

## *Patrick Campbell*

Patrick Campbell is a Senior Lecturer in Drama and Contemporary Performance at Manchester Metropolitan University (UK). He is co-author of the monographs A Poetics of Third Theatre: Performer Training, Dramaturgy, Cultural Action, written alongside Dr Jane Turner, and Owning our Voices: Vocal Discovery in the Wolfsohn-Hart Tradition, written alongside Margaret Pikes, which were both published by Routledge in 2021. He is a Core Member of Cross Pollination, a laboratory for the dialogue between artistic practices.

## *JARSQUAD*

**instagram.com/wearejarsquad/**

JARSQUAD is Carmen Wong, Rachel Dobbs and Tess Wilmot. It explores circular economy/barter around food preservation, by bringing people together to preserve food, and address food surplus/glut, waste, hoarding, recycling, and to re-discover communal abundance, collective action, and conviviality.

# *LUCY WRIGHT*

## Social art bingo—or am I just bitter about the state of the Arts?

# I attended an exhibition of socially engaged art a while back. It should have been right up my street, but instead I felt underwhelmed.

The premise of the work was admirable—people living in a persistently under-funded city region had been supported to create and share their art in a respected public gallery. But the resulting display was unsatisfying. And not because of the artwork itself. Instead it was about the way the project was framed and articulated. I felt as if I'd seen it, in a bunch of different formats, many, MANY times before.

However, later on when I chatted with some of the people who'd been involved—members of various local community groups typically marginalised in mainstream arts provision—it struck me how genuinely meaningful the whole thing had been to those who had taken part. Right across the board they spoke of positive, affirming, even life-changing experiences. Several of the testimonies brought a tear to my eye. I felt guilty for my mean-spiritedness.

It's a tricky balance to achieve for social artists; to make work that connects with the people that their project is purportedly for, while still speaking to a critically-engaged art audience. It's also fair to say that not all social artists actually value art world reception, or the status of their work within a wider canon of art history. Social art typically claims to eschew the 'egotism' of solo-authored practice for a more collaborative, activist approach. It's about making change happen, working for social justice, devising new ways of living and working together on a broken planet. But for me at least, where a project is funded by the Arts Council and the results shown in a public art gallery, then for better or worse, this work must also be read as art.

As an artist myself who (sometimes) makes art with people, it has always felt important that my work should function as art as well as research or advocacy

(although whether I've always achieved this is debatable). But I also know how difficult it can often be to hold on to the 'artness' of my practice in a funding landscape that seems intent on side-lining it at every turn. Several times I've found it close to impossible to reconcile my internal artistic GPS with the needs and priorities of a commissioning organisation or funder—which is perhaps why I have recently made the move to a studio-based practice as a painter, as much to my own surprise as anybody else's.

It sometimes seems to me that an alarming number of commissions for socially engaged art have been designed by people who have never met another person, let alone set foot in an art gallery. These are the commissioners who seem to labour under a bewildering misapprehension about how long collaborative work takes, while at the same time hugely over-estimating the possible impacts that might be achieved. Solve injustice. Fix poverty. Make up for the egregious lack of compassion shown by our Tory government over more than a decade in power. I came to social practice during my PhD at Manchester School of Art and spent years learning how to work with the small community of working-class women I wanted to make art with. It's a decade since our first tentative conversations: now I'm expected to reproduce the same kind of collaboration in six weeks.

(Or perhaps it's not the same kind of collaboration required. I worry that many commissioners are interested in EDI in name only. As long as there are glossy photos of happy, 'hard-to-reach' people having a lovely time, who cares if the art's any good?!).

When project requirements are too broad or the timeframes too short, social artists are forced to rely on big, generalising themes; things that are easily relatable to the largest number of people possible. The White Pube has a 'White Girl Art' bingo card which includes regular favourites like 'stuffed tights as sculpture', 'crying selfie' and 'fruit that looks like genitals' and I've begun compiling a similar one for social art. (DM me if you'd like to hear them!). I'm not saying that these well-worn ideas can't generate meaningful engagement for participants. I'm just saying that *as art* they're (very often) boring. And art isn't supposed to be boring.

I want social art to teach me something. Heck I want it to teach the world something. I want it bold and critically engaged, pushing up against the boundaries of what art can be, and in doing so claim its rightful place in the history of art. I want it to contribute towards the modelling of 'potential new universes' (to quote Nicolas Bourriaud), helping us imagine new, more inclusive and caring ways forwards in these wearying times.

I want it to lead the way in showing how equality, diversity and inclusion can be embedded into an arts process from start to finish. People have said to me, 'but X community wouldn't accept anything too out there' and my response is, firstly, that is so undermining of working-class and marginalised communities and their ability to engage with—and create—big, complex ideas. (I come from a working-class background, so I know that's bollocks). But also, that's literally our job as social artists. It's our job to draw people out and bring them along with us, to build relationships of trust with people over time so that they become our collaborators on these journeys of discovery and agonism. There is absolutely a place for art as therapy, art as education, but that shouldn't be to the exclusion of art as art.

I believe that most social artists worth their salt *want* to create thoughtful, innovative co-produced work. But they're not being supported to make it. This impoverishes both the field of social practice AND the people they work with.

Funders and arts orgs, don't ask us to perform miracles in the space of a fortnight! Let us be the artists we are and trust us to make incredible art with the incredible people that we collaborate with. And social artists, let's make sure that we don't forget about the artist part of our job title. We might have to be prepared to fight for it, in the face of instrumentalization and the innate conservatism of institutions, but it's absolutely worth the struggle.

Social art is art.

**I want it to lead the way in showing how equality, diversity and inclusion can be embedded into an arts process from start to finish.**

## *Lucy Wright*

**artistic-researcher.co.uk**

Lucy Wright is an artist based in Leeds, West Yorkshire. Her work, which combines painting and socially-engaged practice, sits at the intersection of folk(lore) and place, often using as source material the large personal archive of photographs and research she has gathered over nearly a decade of documenting female and queer-led folk customs. Many of her projects reference and subvert traditional practices to comment on contemporary issues, from migration to climate change.

Recent projects have included a residency and solo show, *And You Too Have Come Into The World To Do This* at Analogue Farm (2022) and commissions from Meadow Arts (2021), Leeds Piano Festival (2021) and Lancashire Encounter (2021). She has a practice PhD from Manchester School of Art and works as a Producer for Axisweb, delivering the 'Mental Health for Artists' programme and Social Art Library. She is the editor of *Social Works?* journal.

# *MADELEINA KAY*

## No Freedom Until We Are Equal


No Freedom Until We Are Equal!
WE BELONG
WE BELONG
WE BELONG
STAND UP TO RACISM
I AM HUM

## *Madeleina Kay*

**madeleinakay.com**

Madeleina Kay is an artist, activist and social media campaigner who works as Communications Producer for Axis.

Named 'Young European of the year' in 2018, her polymathic creative work is concerned with issues of Nationalism, identity politics, migration and the Environment. Since 2015 she has written, illustrated and self-published nine books and campaigned on a range of social justice issues. She has written and performed protest songs at events and festivals across Europe, including Open'er Festival (Poland), Yo! Fest (France), Glastonbury Festival (UK), and at the National Justice Museum (UK), Aachen Town Hall and the Nikolaikirche Museum (Germany). In 2019, she completed a performing and research tour of the EU27, with a 'Democracy Needs Imagination' grant from the European Cultural Foundation, under the project title 'The Future is Europe'. This project culminated in the creation of a book and documentary which were awarded the EU Charlemagne Youth Prize in 2020. She also won the Upfront! Young European Video Award in 2020.

# *melissandre varin*

## How to do nothing

# 1)

i have been sniffing this assemblage of words across June 2022 while transitioning - in depth. Transitioning from my role as an artist-curator for B.O.O.K (Building Our Own Knowledge), transitioning as a sensing parent, transitioning as a compassionate love partner, transitioning as a friend with limited emotional capacity, transitioning as an autistic human being, transitioning as a diasporic bab, transitioning as a new settler in Birmingham, transitioning as a West and Central African being, transitioning as a Caribbean archipelago-being, transitioning in-between tongues - licking my direct ancestors' creolising words, transitioning as a French speaker - feeling well - and at home re-using my language, transitioning with a fattening body, transitioning

**-transitioning**

This text is a lot and it is in a way coming from les bas fonds (the shallows) of my inner body, it has been fermenting for years and came out as a Summer baby - in sweat and blood. It is a contortion of my organs - not yet processed - raw as a vivid orang-ing mango - freshly peeled. It smells good though - it smells like a childhood memory of infinity. Running in warm and comforting weather, half-naked, with tiny little shoes, surrounded by the flamboyant scenery of a village-like location that does not need a name in Guadeloupe. i feel surrounded at this moment. But, i might be running alone. But, that's ok because i know i am not alone. And, i am chasing the ice cream truck anyway. Pursuing pleasure as i was made to do as a mutating human being. This last bit of text is a reminder from **Fannie Sosa**. i invite anyone to dive into their research. It is grounding and exciting **(for real)**.

i wrote or regurgitated loads.
On the last day of attempting to annotate my feelings towards this writing commission i woke up with a potential alignment to (dis)articulate this offering. Today i am reminded of ancient, ancestral ways to release tensions, to grow fertile grounds for futuritieS. i am reminded of the mending, the twisting, and pulling of my/our hair. i often experience bodily resistance to arrange thoughts into pretty palatable bouquets - for others. But, i also acknowledge that i am coming from a lineage of sapeurs[1] from DRC and beyond. i accept the excess, the chaotic beauty, and the soft brutality of this text. It is coming together in a time when/where the war against Black beings is still on-going, where there is no space for non-productivist activities

and even less so for grieving and even less so for grieving in non-eurocentric ways. A time when the attention economy is feeding us as much as deviating us from our higher missions, from responding instead of reacting, from being in relation with, from building worlds.

World building work will not only be televised.

Alienation.

In a 'humbling and humble' way, in the tradition of decolonised methodologies- pursuing the impossible dream to mend ourselves. i recall a 2-3 years ago former version of myselves highlighting passages of **Linda Thiwai Smith's Decolonizing Methodologies: research and indigenous peoples**. My text is also a celebration of African and Caribbean diasporic beings both in the West-Midlands, UK and in Dakar that have contributed to the (re)mixing of thoughts across this month of June 2022. i honour my still-born YunNan, and my transitioned mother Danielle, loving ancestors that have guided me towards buried versions of us.

As you go through this invitation to think-with, please watch your body. A flash-back/forward: growing up i learnt how to survive and be-well in the midst of chaos while mothering younger sisters. Megan used to rock her head back and forth on her pillow to soothe and ease before bed time; Stacy used to attempt to sneak her hand under adults' armpits. **My grandmother's hands: racialised trauma and the pathway to mending our hearts and bodies by Resmaa Menakem** is a good read to think with our soul nerves.

Handing out this text i am sticking my hand, under your sticky armpit, practicing a vulgar form of familiar-strange intimacy. We are rocking on a pillow together.

i extend my respect and acknowledgment to the beings that have been doing the work, to those who steward the lands and ecosystems on which i temporarily root/transplant- to communicate underground with transitioning seeds, trees, and forests. i just watched **Love and Anarchy on Netflix** (10 hours in a row) and i can't get over this metaphor. To those who appreciate the fact that care, embodied, and warmth... work is a (Black) feminist affaire a *reverie*- to use **bell hooks' words from Art on my mind, visual politics**.

The text is in 4 parts, 1) one conclusion-opening above, 4) a list of half-pronounced points to foster collective dreams, 3) notes on how to do nothing B.O.O.K residencies taken in Dakar Senegal, 5) B.O.O.K (Building Our Own Knowledge) 2) my own how to do nothing residency note.

## 2)

notes from my how to do nothing residency.

doing nothing is not a goal nor an end it itself it is a tool for Resistance. Inviting our whole selves in 'doing nothing' is accessing portals. Mine led me to grief work.
Inspired / whispered by my ancestors, guided by kindred spirits i trusted. i trusted the seed that my summer should be dedicated to ~~grief and grievance~~ grieving —

i dropped ~~my~~ the stress, the people pleasing, the old habits that do not serve me anymore and i decided to live.
To live the life that has been built for me(too) by living and dead ancestors.
i have to (love) pour rivers of tears to let those who await to - to transition.
i have always been obsessed by funerals, death ceremony, and what it means to live disconnected from them.
Grieving and having access to grieving spaces as a transformative portal is ~~without~~ about trust building. it's sitting as Congolese, Guadeloupeans and Reunies will grieve. i will grieve — too.

## 5)

Building.Our.Own.Knowledge (B.O.O.K) is a co-created cloud for interrogating, finding, making, and sharing experiences and knowledge emanating from Black artists in particular. The communal project is an invitation to rethink and remake knowledge and culture on our own terms. B.O.O.K (r)evolves through radical sharing, caring and disrupting, by using and developing non-extractive collective mechanisms for reinventing the everyday as a political space for collective healing and liberation.

The soft infrastructure of B.O.O.K has been supported by a self-organised working group composed of 9 Black artists, writers, researchers, facilitators and curators including: Antonio Roberts, Mojere Ajayi-Egunjobi, Jae Tallawah, Samiir Saunders, Sym Mendez, Last Mafuba, Hannah Adereti, Ayesha Jones, and myself (melissandre varin).

We run artist residencies and commission West-Midlands-based Black artists; we produce the B.O.O.K podcast inviting Black artworkers to share their knowledge; we hold space for B.O.O.K clubs in the form of collective reading, and dreaming inspired by Black-authored publications for children and adults; we are also preparing the ground for a curatorial intervention in Birmingham to support Black filmmakers.

## 4)

some secret (half-pronounced) points that we can take away with us while sharing the same pillow before dreaming again:

- the importance of the subtitle of **Jenny O'dell's How to do nothing book: resisting the attention economy** has been missing sometimes
- making space for others while still making sure to transition into a forest. Living one's complexity while practicing adjacency. Recently, **Tina M. Campt in A Black gaze: artists changing how we see** has proposed Adjacency as an extension of this concept, using it to rethink how we might undertake reparative work of transforming proximity and closeness into accountability
- Failing at doing nothing and at doing something - losing oneself as a starting point
- letting go, processing deaths (of beings, projects, relationships...), surrendering - to finally grieve
- accepting that this grieving is not going to be capitalised on while having to pay bills
- making space - anyway

there is never enough time or space for grief as reminded by Camille Sapara Barton. We operate in a grief-phobic society that prevents us too often to live - well.

**The GEN grief toolkit, embodiment tools and rituals to support grief work in community by Camille Sapara Barton in partnership with the Global Environments Network** is an open-source essential.

## 3)

Breathing outside - how to do nothing B.O.O.K residencies notes taken in Dakar Senegal

" is to sleep, write, somnoler (doze off), write, read, sleep, in-between and during external activation-moments composed of
opening up of the solar plexus
feeling the touch of the wind - its roughness, softness and its inbetween (too). It reminded me of a talk given by Craig Pinkney at Yard Art House Birmingham UK before i left. Craig said that in the midst of everything that was going on for him at a certain point, his therapist advised him to remember to listen to the birds.

Engaging in an experimental communal research without labeling it as such.

Leaving a conversation with a final punctuation: "on est ensemble" / translating to my partner Sym: "we are together"

And -

to be together - well - there is an investigation of (ana)choreography that needs to be had. **maroon choreography by fahima ife** has shifted something within me. This is also one of the print publications from the B.O.O.K library that i 'prescribed' the most to B.O.O.K residents.

some books ‘ i’ll bring it back’ never to return
never to be missed
transferring realities at distance.

The shelves of linoleum dreams, a healing (art, library, rest) station were always full.
‘mel would you be interested in those books written by Black authors?’

Infiltration
it goes deep(er)
everytime.

it/we operated on infra-frequencies

at the intersection of the invisible/inaudible quotidian. **Listening to images by Tina M. Campt**

turned my inside.

it always has

resonated with me - filled my inside with worries and hopes.

iit always smells like death
putréfaction
rotting of the skin
maybe it is the sun inclination in Dakar
+2 nose piercings
everything seems of the ‘always’
envoutante (voodoo-ing) sensation of the ‘home’
when in transition
a construction

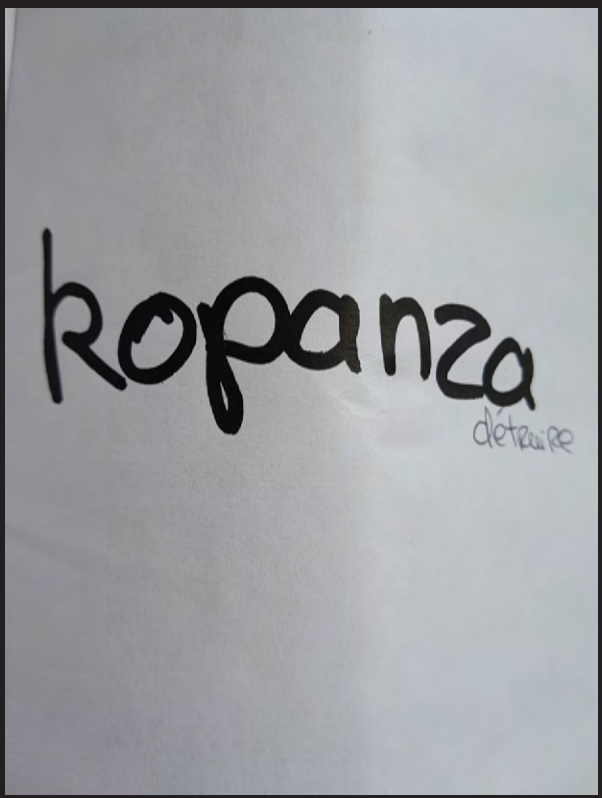
**an offering to new ancestors, installations with books by Black authors, and canned food (2021) Image by Mandip Singh Seehra**

how to do nothing
while Black
twisting of the tongue(s)
warm hands womb-like
getting funding without sweating

their names were Cassie, Amahra, Andrianna, Ryan... the national lottery community fund

cutting £11,000 to offer soft invitations to Black artists from the region to take part into an experimental and non-extractive process to feel through a prompt: 'how to do nothing?'

kopanza - detruire/ to destroy in lingala
language, untransmissed language of my parent


kopanza
détruire

**Loraine Masiya Mponela laughing while resting during her B.O.O.K residency based at linoleum dreams. Image by B.O.O.K working group member Ayesha Jones.**

There are a multiplicity of ways to do nothing but we do not all have access to the gift of time and infrastructure to 'let the question sit in us'. Yes i watched **Marry Me with Jennifer Lopez** on the plane and i cried! B.O.O.K residents taught me to own it. - it: pleasure of micro-movements, infra-frequencies of the quotidian, a 'cool, thank you' and no follow up, a leaving of handwritten notes while reading Suzanne Cesaire, a suggestion of books written by Black authors for the communal library, a list of grievances...

What B.O.O.K residents seemed to almost all have in common was the recognition and acknowledgement that yeah artists 'need to live to write' to cite **Ibeyi talking with Autumn Brown and adrienne maree brown in how to survive the end of the world podcast**

- but what we are often disposed of when working as practicing artists is time to sit with questions - boiling ones, bubbling ones -

time to stare - to stare at the sky/ceiling naked in a space as suggested by **Julien Creuzet in ComMuniK, Contemporary Art and Luxury Through Africa, Dak'Art rétrospective preview, made and offered by Oumi Diaw**. i added the nakedness...

How to do nothing -
is to **take a beat.**

What remains are verbal and embodied conversations touching upon the fact that money is not a reward. Witnessing process, and re-assessment of where we are/ i am at and shifting of our ways of working/knowing - as we grow - (together).

This writing comes at a pivotal time when after holding space as B.O.O.K artist-curator i experimented/ i turned the prompt towards me: **how to do nothing**. My residency was self-funded and i chose to do it at home / in West Africa.

**That's where the dream/research takes shape and becomes pliable.**

1. *The Sapeur is a fashion icon with a very distinctive (sense of) style that does not (necessarily) translate to/ match their social class.Their style is hybridised/ creolised at the intersection of European chic business-like attire influences to distinctive colourful and rich textures from the African continent. The name comes from the following acronym: SAPE (Société des Ambianceurs et des Personnes Élégantes) / (Society of Atmosphere-makers and Elegant beings).*

## *melissandre varin*

**melissandre.hotglue.me/**

melissandre varin is an undisciplined artist investigating love, intimacy, and tenderness in collectives/clouds from an Afro and Caribbean diasporic context. Relation, displacement, multiplicity, interdependency, and language emerge from their work.

Commissioned cross-borders, melissandre co-parents four year old Eole. They co-founded two collectives for which they are: - B.O.O.K (Building Our Own Knowledge*) working group member and artist-curator - Papaya** (cross-border afro-feminist collective) writer and performer and - curate Open Call*** a digital platform part of Studies in Theatre and Performance journal.

# *RACHEL MARSDEN*

## What is Social Prescribing? ‘The Coventry Banner’ Project

***Social prescribing is gaining momentum within health and social care policy in the UK.***

With a history spanning decades, social prescribing builds on socially engaged practices in the arts and culture, and therapeutic roles including Occupational Therapy. But what is social prescribing and what does it look like in (art) practice?

Social prescribing is broadly concerned with helping people find ways to improve their health, wellbeing and social welfare by linking them to local services, organisations and activities for practical and emotional support. This might involve housing, economic, energy and crisis support; advice on exercising and healthy eating, or activities like sports, gardening, volunteering, arts and music.

More recently, social prescribing has been formally established within NHS England's personalised care framework, responding to evidence that the needs raised by patients during one-in-five GP appointments cannot be addressed with medical solutions.[1] Recognising that people's health and wellbeing are affected by a range of social, economic and environmental factors,[2] social prescribing takes a person-centred and holistic approach by asking, 'what matters to me?'[3] Often facilitated through a referral process, an individual will be referred into a service, organisation or activity by a healthcare professional (e.g. GP, nurse, link worker), non-clinical professional (e.g. community organiser), or via self-referral. Through its multi-agency and stakeholder approach, social prescribing encourages collaboration, co-design and co-production by building relationships between people, purpose and place on a (hyper) local level.

Helen Stokes-Lampard and James Sanderson from the National Academy for Social Prescribing (NASP) summarise the benefits of social prescribing as helping to:

***'build relationships, unlock individual strengths, increase choice and control, and support positive connections within the communities where people live.'*** [4]

More recently, social prescribing has been

informed by national agendas in creative health, arts and/for health, and arts for wellbeing, seen to impact the proliferation of projects in galleries, museums and heritage venues. This is exemplified in 'The Coventry Banner' project at the Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, Coventry (13 May —31 August 2022).

'The Coventry Banner' project developed as a legacy project inspired by Array Collective, winners of the Turner Prize 2021 (29 September 2021 —12 January 2022), specifically their social action banners created for use in protests and demonstrations. Array Collective are based in Belfast, currently made up of 11 artists and activists who reclaim and question traditional identities of the North of Ireland. They create collaborative actions in response to the social and political issues affecting the region, such as queer liberation, marriage equality, reproductive rights, NHS funding, city planning and more, working closely with communities.

'The Coventry Banner' project invited local individuals and groups to create a message or design for a banner 'they were passionate about' to become part of a public art installation. An accessible 'Making Guide' was developed to encourage participants to 'get making' using any materials, try something new and be creative, whilst establishing safe spaces to express themselves and their experiences. Community, school, health and wellbeing groups, and more, from across the city of Coventry and beyond, became involved largely via community or self-referral into the project. Although the banner project developed into an example of 'social prescribing in action', the label of social prescribing was not used throughout the project due to its connotations with the medical model (its relationship to medicine and medical care), as its understanding is regularly contested.

***'All voices have been encouraged, irrespective of their level of social recognition, from those in the shielding community, newly arrived citizens and everyone in-between. This is a modern-day reflection of our living social history.'*** [5]

The banners share personal stories and calls to action for social change 'a message to Coventry', with inclusivity at heart.

Following is an interview by Dr Rachel Marsden (RM) with Amanda Haran (AH), alongside excerpts from participant stories. Rachel is a curator, researcher and writer interested in care work, informed by her practice in arts and health, social prescribing and lived experience of disability, and Amanda is Learning and Engagement Officer at the Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, and instigator of 'The Coventry Banner' project.

**RM**
**How was 'The Coventry Banner' project initiated?**

AH
I connected with the Artichoke Trust, who work with artists to develop ambitious events in public spaces. I'd also created banners before for International Women's Day events. They offered the Herbert Art Gallery & Museum (the Herbert) boxes and boxes of suffragette sashes for free from their 2018 project 'Processions'. Therefore, 'The Coventry Banner' project was built around these resources, whilst responding to Array Collective's practice. The Herbert said they wanted something big, but I had no idea what was needed to undertake a project on this scale, and with typical budgetary constraints. I immediately asked myself, how am I going to make this work?

Each of the banners is made on a sash. The sheer-textured fabric defined how the banner project developed, what could be used to decorate them, and how they could be hung. I came to see them as modern-day suffragette sashes, which seems appropriate as sashes have been consistently used to champion the voices of Coventry and Warwickshire's communities. As an important fabric, the sash carries forward the active and activist messages of our time.

The Herbert were proud to work under Array Collective's blessing and establish positive connections to their practice, using their approach to legitimise what we were doing. I don't think Array expected the project to be as big as it was! The banner project was always art —an installation —rather than craft. I feel that art uses expression and imagination to create something unique and personal, whereas craft uses methods that can be easily reproduced.  One is an emotional manifestation and the other is more functional. I don't believe that one holds more merit over the other. I just wanted the banner project to be without constriction and as closely aligned to the work and output of Array as was possible. We wanted to create something of quality. I didn't want it to be tokenism. I wanted people to identify themselves as legitimate artists in the community through their experience.

**RM**
**What was your role in 'The Coventry Banner' project?**

AH
I consider myself a holistic creative therapist —a practising artist and psychotherapist informed by lived experience —and have supported complex needs including physical and mental health, learning disability and more. I wanted to create an empathetic and trusting environment, and have previously worked with organisations to champion their thinking in these areas, asking them to push boundaries and be brave in their offer and work. My skills and experience opened doors for people in the banner project, even if I only had one session with them. Although, this didn't give me time to build rapport, I wanted to help people believe they could participate in the banner project.

When making the banners, I thought we'd get universal messages coming through like climate change, the things that bond us all. Instead, it broke into three areas based on the quality of relationship: external influences like global and national subjects; local issues in Coventry, and therapeutic and personal journeys...what was important to participants, like mental health difficulties, family issues, different addictions, rehabilitation and recovery. A key aim of the project was about increasing confidence within the community and you can't just do that through a singular encounter. Just as people begin to feel more positive, funding often dries up and projects can't continue. I asked myself, how could the banner project be different? I wanted it to be about changing awareness and changing behaviour. It was all about the dignity for those participating.

Project Art Works —also a finalist for the Turner Prize 2021 —specifically Anna Farley, worked hard on an accessible guide for the Turner Prize for neurodiverse communities. I saw the impact the guide had not just on people who were neurodiverse, but also on Front of House staff —'I wish we always had this guide' —in demystifying the Turner Prize and making it more inclusive. Seeing that it was beneficial, we wanted the guide to be embedded as part of the Herbert's on-going interpretation and communication. So, for the banner project, we created a step-by-step accessible 'Making guide', for participants and groups to use to create their banner, alongside an online discussion group.

*'Black women have always served on the front-line in the fight for equality. Diane Abbott is a woman I admire, she tolerated racism, abuse and attacks, I learnt interviewing women who work in civil services invest more years campaigning and working for a political party to get where their fellow members of the constituency are. They have to face so many closed doors, that is why we need to support our local MPs such as Taiwo Owatemi and Zarah Sultana.*

*My 'Ethnic Women Need to Be In Parliament' banner is my activism to encourage and mobilise every woman, young women and women of ethnic heritage to stand up for our rights, to be proactive in making change for equality, this could be petitions, writing articles, voting, community work, campaigning or volunteering. Together we can transform our future for generations to come to fulfil leadership roles, enhance lives and provide outlooks and perspectives to better political decision-making.'*

**Sherrie Edgar**

**RM**
**How did you identify individuals and groups to invite to participate?**

AH
From a strategic point of view, the banner project initially made links to groups mentioned in the Herbert's business plan. These are areas and wards in Coventry that the gallery and museum was targeting through audience engagement. At the beginning, I had little knowledge of Coventry and its communities and relied on knocking on doors, emailing, having conversations. I found that as one door opened, more and more doors opened.

I find that certain facets of the community are far more equipped and confident in taking part in art projects. They are signed up to the notifications, feel confident to converse in the language used and have experience of engaging since they were children. I'm interested in those who might have never been taken to an art gallery in their lives; take a look at our big doors and think 'That's NOT a place for me'; have been told they're no good at art; encounter cultural or digital poverty so they don't find out about the collaborative art and wellbeing opportunities in their community. I was interested in working with individuals and groups that lack a certain level of opportunity and desire to take part in art projects. So I prioritised working with these communities, which included specific wards and shielding communities and closed therapeutic groups. The banner project started with two banners — one from a Sixth Form College in Nuneaton, another from Hereward College in Coventry, which supports young people with disabilities and additional needs.

I gave myself a target of 50 banners. In the early stages, it was clear I was going to exceed this number. I had to overcome my introversion to make people believe I knew what I was doing, and show that I could be confident in groups. If participants believe in you then, it's a lot easier. I expected groups to be open and human, and for there to be the same approach in the organisation I'm working in. It felt like an unknown adventure, making me question, what are the risks? Could everyone... anyone...do this?

When participants asked how edgy they could be, I said, 'be as edgy as

*'The banner that I was personally involved in making was in collaboration with a group of artists showcasing their work in an exhibition entitled 'Hope Punk' @the LTB Art Space in Coventry city centre. 'Hope Punk' invited Creative Kindness to run a collaborative workshop as part of their exhibition one Saturday in April. Visitors were invited to join us in creating the "Hope Punk" Banner by writing messages on a label based on the question 'What does hope mean to you?'*

*Just from that one simple word "hope", it resulted in some very powerful and thought-provoking conversations and written messages for our banner. I considered myself very humbled to be party to reading these very personal messages and sewing them onto the completed banner.*

*The whole experience of collaborating with other artists, members of the public, and community groups has resonated so much with me and the word "hope" has allowed me to highlight and carry it on in my role as a Creative Kindness Leader.'*

**Shirley Harper**

you want!'. I didn't want to stop them talking or being honest and I am proud of the uncensored results. Of course, had there been derogatory, prejudice or discriminatory statements made towards each other or other groups, there would have been the need to intervene and remove the banners, however this made me question if I ran the project again, should I have put more boundaries in place as to what was acceptable?

**RM**
**What has been the learning from the Banner Project?**

AH
It made me understand how Coventry people have wide passions concerning practical and emotional needs, such as increasing the number of public toilets and rest spaces in the city centre, to the saving of the trees earmarked for destruction because of Council road widening, and the need for a kindness revolution. The desire for change is very strong if you take time to listen.

The banner project has made me learn more about my practice. I've grown in confidence, but I've also realised I'm not a leader: I'm happier working in a team. I problem solve from the start to the end of the day. It is possible to overinvest with groups. For this work to be successful, you have to have an empathetic joy for people, to be buoyant and upbeat when others might not feel the same way. It is about being patient, encouraging and non-judgemental irrespective of the number of times you've supported an individual or group with a concept. When a project has derided 280 banners like this, that's a lot of joy aligned to emotion. It's exhausting. I think because I try to offer these rapport-making skills to everyone, I need to limit the group size as I've found this can become detrimental to my own wellbeing. I also find myself using projects as levers to legitimise my work and practice. This is reflected in the work of Array Collective who also seek to legitimise everyday methods and materials, like poster paints, felt tip pens and other things that are not usually associated with contemporary art making, so I also used these ideas as hooks for engagement.

The possibility to make a difference is what drives my practice: I'm humbled and privileged that people wanted to share and learn from their experiences through the banner project. Disclosure from

participants was huge, from stories of pulling hair out (Trichotillomania) to domestic abuse. We faced so much unexpected loss, including two participants who passed away as the banner project progressed. With consent from their families, we were able to finish (if needed) and include their banners. I wanted to make sure the banner project became a therapeutic and positive space; a space to honour those two people, and reflect on everyone's stories. With encouragement, individuals and groups could participate fully and develop a sense of community, professionalism and pride. Regardless of my knowledge and experiences though, I still felt vulnerable.

One of the problems with the banner project —if you can call it a problem —was that it was so successful, rolling down a hill gaining more momentum. It also required so many different parties to buy into the banner project and this was really hard work. Now that stakeholders, colleagues, the public have seen the banner project and the impact on participants and groups, they want another project. Although the Herbert had exhibited in the covered court before, they were not used to having something this big or by such a large number of individuals and community groups. So it was extra work to install, but has since softened the entrance to the gallery and museum. I see it now as a community space.

The launch of the banner project was part of Mental Health Awareness Week (9 —15 May 2022). It was a solidifying element of the banner project. We don't do enough of celebrating our achievements in the arts...we jump straight onto the next thing. It was lovely to have an ending —a celebration —but at the same time I also knew it wasn't an ending. It left me feeling almost bereft after building such rapport with the groups, making the banners, then you're done...what's next? The intention is to have continued community engagement of this kind within current and future projects —to care for the community in a holistic sense, working beyond the limits of social prescribing —at the forefront of who we are and what we do as a mode of being.

***'My banner represents the social change needed to make the world actually inclusive for all, and be a happier place to live. I believe there needs to be a "Kindness Revolution" as the world is such a negative, draining and isolated place, even more so when you're classed as a minority, or someone who is part of a marginalised group—whether this be because of your faith, your gender identity, your relationship or the colour of your skin. It is not enough to just be 'tolerant' of others in this world.***

***As a society, we need to do better. We need to BE better. With a myriad of issues in our personal lives, added to by governmental failures, it is becoming imperative that we need to be kinder and more understanding of others.***

***Let's raise each other up and champion our successes together, rather than tear each other down at every opportunity.'***

**Harriet**

1. *Helen Stokes-Lampard and James Sanderson, 'Launching our vision, a social revolution in wellbeing', National Academy for Social Prescribing (NASP), accessed August 9, 2022, https://socialprescribingacademy.org.uk/launching-our-vision-a-social-revolution-in-wellbeing/*
2. *'What is social prescribing', The King's Fund, accessed 9 August 2022. https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/social-prescribing*
3. *'Social Prescribing', NHS England, accessed August 9, 2022, https://www.england.nhs.uk/personalisedcare/social-prescribing/*
4. *Helen Stokes-Lampard and James Sanderson, 'Launching our vision, a social revolution in wellbeing', National Academy for Social Prescribing (NASP), accessed August 9, 2022, https://socialprescribingacademy.org.uk/launching-our-vision-a-social-revolution-in-wellbeing/*
5. *'Coventry Banner Exhibition', Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, accessed August 9, 2022, https://www.theherbert.org/whats-on/1667/coventry-banner*


ETHNIC
WOMEN
NEED TO
BE IN
PARLIAMENT

## *Rachel Marsden*

**rachelmarsden.co.uk / Twitter: @rachmarsden**

Dr Rachel Marsden is a curator, researcher, educator and arts writer with experience across arts, culture and heritage; creative health and social prescribing; Higher Education and academia, from living in the UK, USA, China and Australia. Interested in practice-based research, inclusive pedagogies and ethics of care, her work is informed by lived experience of disability. Rachel also researches contemporary artistic and curatorial practices in China and the Asia-Pacific, with a practice-led PhD in 'The Transcultural Curator: Translating Networked Curatorial Practices in the Chinese Context Since 1980' from the Centre for Chinese Visual Arts (CCVA) (Birmingham City University). Alongside freelance curatorial and consultancy roles, she is currently Research Training Manager and Senior Lecturer in Practice-based Research at University of the Arts London (UAL); Regional Champion for the Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance (UK) in the West Midlands, and a member of the International Association of Arts Critics (AICA).

# *SOFIA BARTON*

## Social art and its impacts(?) in a programme for an intergenerational coastal community

**Last year I was commissioned as an artist in residence for a programme called Bay Create, which is an intergenerational arts project based in Whitley Bay, Tyne and Wear.**

Bay Create brings older & younger people together to participate in arts activities, and the aim of my residency was to nurture positive connections between people of all ages at Whitley Bay Big Local and The Base Young People's Centre.

There were multiple groups involved in the project. The weekly events at Whitley Bay Big Local and Barnardo's The Base Young People's Centre attract both regulars and new faces. Connections with other groups in the community were also made, including an art class at Marsden High School, a local care home and girl scouts group. Each visit would encourage participants to come to more sessions in future. In addition, social events such as a trip to St Mary's Lighthouse and Whitley Bay Library were set up to bring the coastal communities together.

At its core the work involved social art or the application of arts and creativity towards the transformation of individuals, groups and societies. The programme lasted a few months, and slowly accumulated more participants towards the winter months, culminating in a co-created artwork.

The pattern of the sessions followed a similar format. It would open with a small introduction to the project, explaining what we were making. Then there were introductions, and a warm-up to establish connections, followed by communally-eaten food. Participants were then encouraged to create or colour a template for a mandala (a mandala is a geometric configuration of symbols which can help mindfulness and are used in Asian cultures to aid in spiritual meditation.) The group

***THE PANDEMIC LED MORE PEOPLE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE ARTS, AND THIS COMMUNITY CERTAINLY EMBRACED IT AS A WAY OF COMING TOGETHER.***

could talk to each other while taking part in this relaxing activity. At the end of the session, the group would be invited to create a larger mandala from everyone's work, by communicating and working together. They could then offer feedback and thoughts which would then be worked on in the next session by the group.

Each week the dynamics of the group would change. As the numbers of artwork grew, so did the complexity and interactions of working with one another. These sessions led people of different age ranges, genders, LGBTQ+, disabilities and race to work together equally.
The materials were easy to use to make it inclusive for all ability levels. I created templates for the mandala shapes for the social artwork beforehand so there was always a pattern for the final outcome. All sessions were a little different and we created inks from nature, used Posca pens, felt-tips, and acrylic paints. However, participants could choose whichever materials they wanted to use, and the community often preferred recycled materials, being aware of the need to protect the environment. They understood that art could help them send this message as a tool, while also being an activity that they could all do together safely.

Ensuring inclusion during the project meant supporting participants with additional needs. Different sites such as the school and care home had their own systems in place, and at the events for

Whitley Bay Big Local or Barnardos the Base, places could be pre-booked for sessions allowing preparation if needed. As the project took place in 2021, this also meant disinfection, hand sanitiser and face mask wearing to ensure people's safety.

The pandemic led more people to participate in the arts, and this community certainly embraced it as a way of coming together. During the first lockdown between March and May in 2020, many people turned to home-based arts and cultural activities, with around one-in-five people increasing their arts engagement. I believe a lot of people started coming to our in-person sessions as a transition out of lockdown.

During sessions I would regularly hear about the positive impacts of taking part—how it was improving people's mental health, keeping them busy, allowing them to make friends, getting them out of the house and encouraging them to practice art again after a long hiatus. The allowance of these safe spaces and project allowed them to create their therapeutic art and celebrate it as a closer community.

## *Sofia Barton*

**sofiabartonart.wordpress.com/**

Sofia Barton is a multidisciplinary artist from the North East. She was the Artist for UK Pride 2022 and often uses imagery inspired by her Punjabi heritage, identity and sense of place. Her style of work is described as New Antiquarian as she explores archives, hidden history including those of ethnic minorities and LGBTQIA+ communities. She has worked with organisations such as Laing Art Gallery, GemArts, Curious Arts, Barnardos North, Tyneside Cinema and the Baltic Centre of Contemporary Art.

Being part of a marginalised group, she feels there are too many challenges being faced by queer people of colour and have various intersections of discriminations — so the the work she creates has to be actively speaking to these biases, empowering minority groups, and creating opportunities for wider spectrums of visibility in a bid to challenge one-dimensional stereotypes, lazy, one-sided narratives, racism, xenophobia, and all forms of bigotry, which has become more rife in our society today. She hopes to speak to these issues through my work, especially shattering stereotypes and misperceptions of minority and LGBTQIA+ groups in the wake of the economic crisis.

# *SRG BENNETT*

## Art, policy and the New York City Public Artist in Residence programme

**Social art has the potential to create an emotional impact and provide alternative visions to the status quo.**

I have mapped effects such as these to the policymaking cycle to consider the role that art can play in policy.

What is policy and why does it matter? A useful definition of policy is: the sum total of government action, from signals of intent to the final outcomes, and including decisions not to take action.[1] Historical UK government policies have led to the creation of the NHS,[2] the banning of plastic straws,[3] and the right of council tenants to buy houses they lived in at a substantial discount.[4]

Many artistic practitioners would consider these kinds of events important and worth focusing their attention towards. The Art-Policy Matrix conceptualises the impact of art on policy, and aims to provide a guide to artists, funders, curators and others to target their activity, if desired. For the last decade, the New York City Government has operated a Public Artist in Residence (PAIR) programme, matching artists with municipal government departments. This article, based on the work of five artists in the PAIR programme, situates this practical example in the Art-Policy Matrix theoretical framework.

## The Art-Policy Matrix

I have previously identified six effects of art relevant for policymaking,[5] informed by a literature review, interviews with policymakers and my fifteen years of experience working in British policy whilst practising as an artist. These are:

- *A cognitive impact - art can raise awareness of issues and provide information which people may not otherwise have found or be aware of;*
- *An emotional impact relating to a policy matter;*
- *A more-than-text experience of information relevant to policy - for example where policy concepts are instead depicted visually, sonically, physically, and so on;*
- *The creation and manifestation of alternatives to the 'status quo' which can be defined as the 'existing state of affairs, especially regarding social or political issues[6];*
- *A framing for dialogue and discussion;*
- *The urge and sense of agency to act on an issue.*

The policy cycle appears in HM Treasury's Green Book on the appraisal and evaluation of policies.[7] Cairney provides a slightly more intuitive version shown in Figure 1.[8] Whilst Cairney notes that there are limitations and critiques of the policy cycle, my experience is that many policymakers deploy something like this framework as a mental model when working on a policy.

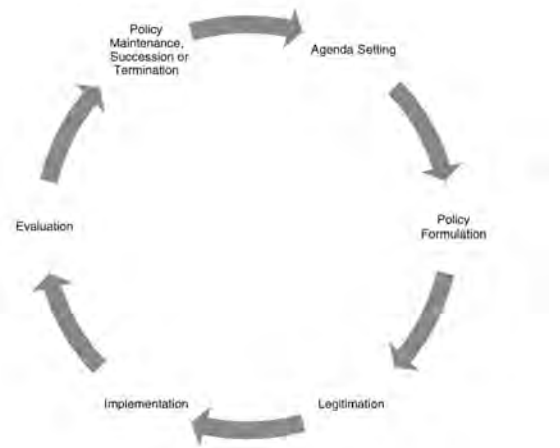



**Figure 1:**
**A version of the policy cycle, showing a hypothetical framework for how policies are made (Cairney 2020:27)**

These two typologies—the six effects of art on policy and the six stages of the policy cycle—can be set against each other to create an Art-Policy Matrix which explores the roles that art can play at various points across the policy process. Figure 2 shows this Matrix, while my previous research has populated this framework with twenty-one historical examples.[9]

| Six effects of the arts on policy / Stages of the policy cycle | Multisensory experience | Cognitive impact | Emotional impact | Ideas and alternatives to the status quo | Dialogical space | Agency |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Agenda setting | | | | | | |
| Policy formulation | | | | | | |
| Legitimation | | | | | | |
| Implementation | | | | | | |
| Evaluation | | | | | | |
| Policy maintenance, succession or termination | | | | | | |

**Figure 2:**
**The Art-Policy Matrix (Bennett 2021)**


**Figure 3:**
**A screenshot of a New York Police Department surveillance film made available by the NYC Department of Records and Information Services in 2019. The original film surveils an anti-segregation demonstration from June 18, 1963[10]**

## The New York City Government Public Artists in Residence (PAIR) programme

The New York City Government's Public Artists in Residence (PAIR) programme is a 'municipal residency program that embeds artists in city government to propose and implement creative solutions to pressing civic challenges'.[11] The programme is run by the New York Department for Cultural Affairs. Each artist is paired with another municipal department with existing examples including the Department of Probation, the Civic Engagement Commission and and the Department for the Aging. In April 2022, I met five artists who were or had been on the PAIR programme. The next section describes the artists' work as part of PAIR and situates it in the Matrix.

## PAIR artists and the Art-Policy Matrix

Kameron Neal is currently in residence at the NYC Department of Records and Information Services (DORIS). He is working with officials to sift through New York Police Department (NYPD) archive records from the 1970s and '80s. The archive includes digitised NYPD surveillance footage on 16mm film, largely black and white (see Figure 3); lots of police reports which include notated newspaper clippings and fliers; still photography from the NYPD photo unit. The footage, in particular, provides an incredibly rich—and invasive, to those being secretly monitored—record of the period, including the tapestry of street life. Neal says of this work, 'how am I—a black queer artist—uniquely positioned to reclaim and repurpose NYPD surveillance footage that framed my people as 'enemies of the status quo'?'[12]

The archives are already publicly available, but they are large and not necessarily easy for everyone to engage with. My assessment is that Neal is using artistic strategies to raise awareness of the archives by creating a multimedia sensory experience of them. He then goes beyond this. In his words he is reclaiming, repurposing and, I would add researching the archive, drawing out insights for contemporary policy dialogues.[13] The role that artists may play in research relevant to policy is perhaps underrepresented in the Art-Policy Matrix.

Melanie Crean is also part of the PAIR programme in 2022-23, working with the Department of Design and Construction. Crean's work explores the intersection of architecture, symbols and criminal justice outcomes and she is using this lens to consider the restoration of the Staten Island justice centre. The visual language of the triangle, with its strong associations to hierarchy, is present in both the physical architecture of the courthouse (see Figure 4) and the culture of the institution and the justice system.[14] An alternative symbol for Crean is the circle, manifested in youth justice circles she runs with young people involved in the criminal justice system. In reference to the Art-Policy Matrix, Crean is creating dialogical space relating to the city's criminal justice policies, and opening up an alternative to the existing hierarchical model. It does not appear that she is doing this in the context of a new policy idea; arguably her work might be considered in terms of implementation of a broad crime reduction/youth support agenda, or evaluation of the existing set of policies as failing. Perhaps more importantly, Crean's work addresses the culture of these political institutions, something common to a number of PAIR participants.

**Figure 4:**
**Author's sketch from discussion with Melanie Crean**


**Figure 5:**
**Proposal drawing for Janet Zweig's Move the Needle. Courtesy of the artist**[15]

Between 2019—2020, Janet Zweig explored issues relating to environmental change at the Mayor's Office for Sustainability. Janet developed a planned installation called Move The Needle, a kinetic sculpture which would move depending on a) the observed increase in global warming, b) pledges taken by New York citizens to reduce emissions and c) numbers of people gathering next to the sculpture, a traditional place of protest in New York (Figure 5). Referencing the matrix, Zweig's work at PAIR could be seen in the 'creation of dialogical space' and 'creating a sense of agency' columns, perhaps weighted towards the 'legitimation', 'implementation' and 'evaluation' parts of the policy cycle. However, Zweig's work also acted on another level. According to the artist, and reaffirmed in a separate interview with Kate Gouin, then Chief of Staff at the Office, Zweig's work positively affected the culture of the office. 'You could hear people talk differently,' Gouin said. Janet's process—shadowing meetings, creating a nature library in the office, bringing in prompts and books to adorn her desk space, interviewing staff—opened up different ways of thinking in the Ministry, ultimately leading to a more human and animal-focused approach by a necessarily technical leaning team.

Rachel Barnard is a social practice artist formally trained as an architect. Her residency at the Department of Probation (2018-19) was characterised by the creation of beautiful, immersive 'Wisdom Pavilions' in the Department's buildings. The pavilions aimed to provide a space for strengthening relationships between Probation Officers and parolees, specifically through Barnard's 'art listening' approach.[16] This work is nested in the artist's broader practice which has included an arts diversion program for teens being prosecuted as adults in criminal court—with the startling result that over 700 young people have been sentenced to make art instead of jail or other adult sanctions.[17] In some respects, there is a clear location for Barnard's work in the Art-Policy Matrix: she is creating a dialogical space and a set of alternatives to the status quo at the 'implementation' stage of the policy process, where New York's criminal policies are being enacted by Probation Officers. However, in an interview Barnard raised important questions about the value of looking at 'policy'. Barnard has referred to the following quote from Patrisse Cullors, co-founder of the Black Lives Matter movement: 'You can't policy your racism away. We no longer have Jim Crow laws, but we still have Jim Crow hate'.[18] Barnard's practice may fit into the Art-Policy Matrix, yet her work also operates on another plateau. Barnard indicates she is not so much interested in any policy change that may result from her practice, but more a change in culture in the Department of Probation and broader probation system.

Julia Weist also conducted her residency at DORIS, between 2019-20. Weist's focus was the broad relationship between the city's government and its artists as captured in the bureaucratic record. Weist unearthed forms completed by officials assessing artworks for public commissions, memos sent back and forth by executives describing the artworks and their applicability for various public settings and even paperwork surrounding a proposed exhibition by 'fine art photographer' Rudi Giuliani.[19] Weist's collage-informed work, shown in Figure 6, is both reflective and iterative. The photographs of archive material will now, procedurally, need to re-enter DORIS' system, to be retained for posterity. While the other four PAIR artists considered here produced work relating to non-cultural policy areas—probation, sentencing, police surveillance, environmental change—Weist's is concerned specifically with cultural policy. On one level, her work is reflective of the entire system/process by which art relates to policy, and could be seen to map onto the entire Art-Policy Matrix. It can also be seen to use multisensory forms to raise awareness of, and create a dialogical space for, the evaluation of cultural policy in New York over the post-war period.

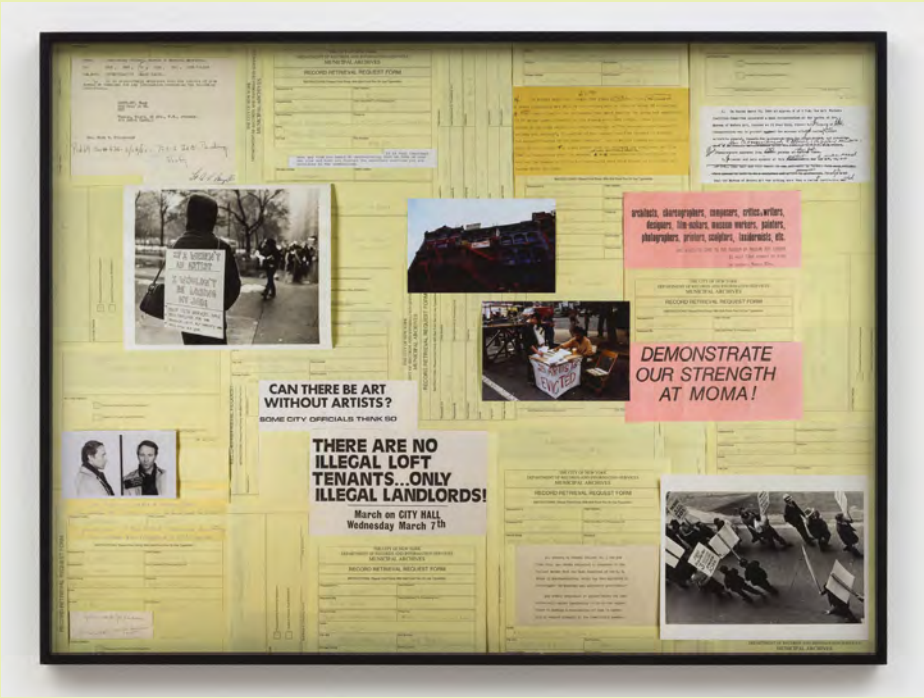



**Figure 6:**

**Figure 5: Julia Weist Demonstration, 2020. Courtesy of the artist and Rachel Uffner Gallery [20]**

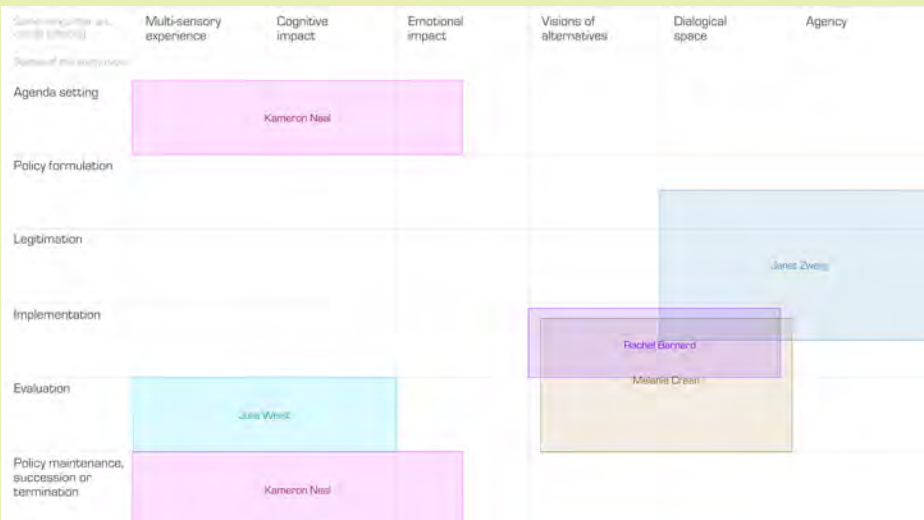



**Figure 7:**
**The Art-Policy Matrix, complete with the practice of the five artists as part of the PAIR programme.**

## Summary

A composite map of how the work produced by these five artists, as part of the PAIR programme, might be situated into the Art-Policy Matrix is provided in Figure 7.

The process of speaking with artists from the PAIR programme, and writing this article, has challenged my thinking regarding this theoretical framework in three ways. First, the Matrix perhaps underestimates the role that artists can play in research relating to a policy area. This could feed into the 'Ideas and alternatives to the status quo' column and 'evaluation' part of the policy cycle, but also could be broader than that. Second, the Matrix focuses on the process of policymaking, but perhaps there is at least one further plane on which art can act on policymaking, by affecting the culture of policymakers. This could reside in the 'Emotional impact' column, but again could be broader. Third, in the specific context of cultural policy, the Matrix can operate on two levels. We can consider the relationship to cultural policy in the same way that an artwork may affect how environmental or transport policy is made, i.e. art could have some of the effects described at different points of the policy's cycle. Then, works about cultural policy enter a meta level, whereby they quickly end up describing the Matrix as a whole. If we think that art can inform policy, then the policy that affects art has additional salience and iteration in terms of impact.

I do not see these as flaws in the Art-Policy Matrix conceptual framework, but rather a series of insights and anomalies encouraged by the existence of it. I hope the Matrix can be useful to readers, researchers, artists, funders, policymakers and so on, as a speculation to organise and provoke your thoughts around how art may relate to policy in areas like New York's Public Artist in Residence programme.

1. *This definition is based on one included in a summary of definitions of the term 'policy' by the academic Paul Cairney. See "What is Policy," Paul Cairney, 2016, accessed Sept 5, 2022. https://paulcairney.wordpress.com/2016/03/04/what-is-policy-3/*

2. *Including the passing of The National Health Service Act in 1946*

3. *In March 2019 legislation was laid in the Houses of Parliament to ban, in England, the supply of plastic straws, stirrers and cotton buds*

4. *Including the passing of the 1980 Housing Act*

5. *"The Art-Policy Matrix (Article 3/5)," S.R.G. Bennett, 2021, accessed Sept 5, 2022. https://www.srgbennett.com/blog/2021/02/01/the-art-policy-matrix*

6. *"Status quo", Oxford Languages, 2022, accessed Sept 5, 2022. https://www.google.com/search?q=status+quo+meaning&rlz=1C5CHFA_*

7. *HM Treasury, The Green Book: Central Government Guidance on Appraisal and Evaluation. HMT, 2022, 15.*

8. *P. Cairney, Understanding Public Policy: Theories and Issue 2nd edn (London: Red Globe Press, 2020), 27*

9. *"The Art-Policy Matrix II (Article 4/5)," S.R.G. Bennett, 2021, accessed Sept 5, 2022. https://www.srgbennett.com/blog/the-art-policy-matrix-ii*

10. *Kenneth R. Cobb, "New York Surveillance Films", Department of Records and Information Services (blog), Nov 1, 2019, accessed Sept 5, 2022. https://www.archives.nyc/blog/tag/Handschu*

11. *"Public Artists in Residence (PAIR)," City of New York, 2022, accessed Sept 5, 2022. https://www1.nyc.gov/site/dcla/publicart/pair.page*

12. *Ibid*

13. *"Public Records, NYPC Surveillance, Performance Art", S.R.G. Bennett (blog), 2022, accessed Sept 5, 2022. https://www.srgbennett.com/blog/2022/5/26/clore-fellowship-study-visit-to-usa-public-records-nypd-surveillance-performance-art*

14. *"Artist Melanie Crean, Shape and NYC Criminal Justice," S.R.G. Bennett (blog), 2022, accessed Sept 5, 2022. https://www.srgbennett.com/blog/2022/4/21/clore-fellowship-study-visit-to-usa-melanie-crean*

15. *Image available at "Move the Needle," Janet Zweig [2020], accessed Sept 5, 2022. https://www.janetzweig.com/public/MoveTheNeedle.html*

16. *"Public Artists in Residence (PAIR)," Municipal Artist Partnerships [2018?] accessed Sept 5, 2022. https://municipal-artist.org/profiles/profiles/public-artists-in-residence*

17. *"Rachel G. Barnard," A Blade of Grass [2018?] accessed Sept 5, 2022, accessed Sept 5, 2022. Available at: https://abladeofgrass.org/fellows/rachel-g-barnard/*

18. *"ABOG Fellowship Application Sample," A Blade of Grass [2018?] accessed Sept 5, 2022. https://www.abladeofgrass.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/FellowshipApplication_SamplePacket.pdf*

19. *"Art and Government: Julia Weist Interviewed by Cat Tyc," Bomb, 2022, accessed Sept 5, 2022. https://www.racheluffnergallery.com/www_racheluffnergallery_com/2022_Bomb.pdf)*

20. *Image of Julia Weiss' artwork 'Demonstration', available at "Public Record," Julia Weiss [2020?], accessed Sept 5, 2022. http://work.deaccession.org/public-record/*

## *SRG Bennett*

**srgbennett.com**

Stephen is a multimedia artist who experiments with science and policy. He entwines an interest in reflection, glass, colour and mark-making with the study and practice of policymaking. Stephen has exhibited widely including at the Tate Exchange, Royal Society, Andrew Brownsword Gallery, Terre Verte Gallery, Imperial University and the Chiesa San Franscesco, Atina. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of the Arts, a Nesta champion and a Clore 16 Fellow sponsored by the Wellcome Trust. Stephen is co-Head of the UK's Policy Lab and has worked in the UK's science, transport, energy and climate change ministries. Stephen has published in Nature, the SciArt Magazine and Inter Alia. His MFA was from Central Saint Martins, and he has undertaken residencies at CERN, Joya Arte y Ecologia and Grizedale Arts.

**SAFEDI project**

# *ANNA MACDONALD*

## ‘The Milky Way’, by The Women’s Art Activation System (The WAAS)

# “Amongst all the vast swathes of flesh carefully painted—a nipple. It is surprising to be reminded how visceral breastfeeding is.

**I forget. This is forgotten. I thought maybe there was more of a place and acknowledgement of breastfeeding back then (are these paintings 16 or 15 century?) because presumably that was the only way children lived. The grabbing of the nipple by the baby. The effort to latch. Also, the transcendent wonder of being able to produce milk to feed a baby. Creating the universe, creating life. I forget this.”**

A response to the provocation ‘Artists Make Policy’ by a participant in The Milky Way

The Milky Way is the title of a participatory game by The Women's Art Activation System (WAAS), which took place at the National Gallery in 2021. The title speaks both of small chocolate bars that you can eat between meals, and the rapture and wonder of things beyond our grasp. For The WAAS it also refers to Tintoretto's painting of the Goddess Juno, 'The Origin of the Milky Way' (1575) and the visceral business of breastfeeding with its warm sweet smell of skin, milk and spit.

When we arrived at the National Gallery, we were given a pink and gold folder containing a sheet of stickers featuring close-up images of breastfeeding and nursing from paintings in the collection, a game board, and a customised gallery map showing in which rooms they could be found. The game was to find the painting, which matched each sticker, and stick the stickers on the corresponding title on a board of gold-framed text. The Milky Way game gave me, as a participant, permission to discount the majority of the pictures in the gallery and focus only on the images of nursing women and their babies. The smallness of the stickers, the tactile memory of stickering, felt a long way from the permanence and grandeur of the artworks on show. Yet, the stickers and charts were so beautifully reproduced, using such high-quality materials, that for me playful parallels were drawn between the gravitas of Renaissance painting and the careful, precise art of stickering.

The Milky Way is a serious game, where participants are invited to focus on the way maternal experiences are represented in the National Gallery's paintings. We moved between stickers, our sticky bodies and the heavens as if in some kind of strange history/art/biology field trip. It brought my attention to what happens when you bring the moving body into relationship with static paintings. It brought playful scrutiny to how we can encounter the growing, transformational maternal body in a space dedicated to stasis and preservation.

**"By using a printed game, we have made something that allows people to take part without us being there. We were also interested in the idea that participants could be of much higher status than ourselves, and in disrupting assumptions that 'participants' are vulnerable, low status and marginalised while 'policy-makers' have some kind of power and are not participants to the work but are responders and are expected to listen to the 'other'."**

**The WAAS**

The Women's Art Activation System is an artist collective, based in Stroud, Gloucestershire, who create models and systems that can be used by others to activate their own or other women's art. Led by artists Sharon Bennett and Sarah Dixon, The WAAS was formed in 2016. Their work sits within the historical lineage of social practice and institutional critique and they focus on practices that remain unbounded, inviting what they call 'anarchic possibility'. In the picture of them in the gallery The WAAS are smiling. They often smile. They are polite and nice and insistent. It makes them easy to discount and hard to refuse. They are politely political and feel ever-so-slightly dangerous. Their work is concerned with validation, visibility and experience.

As an artist researcher whose work focuses on social practice, I had the opportunity to meet The WAAS as part of the Social Art for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion project (SAFEDI). SAFEDI explored the capacity of socially engaged artists, such as The WAAS, to influence institutional EDI policy and my role within it was to support The WAAS in ways they felt were useful, during their commission.

The main form this support took was a series of conversations between us where the artists explored the process of developing the project. This writing reproduces parts of these conversations and represents our collective reflection on their part in the SAFEDI project.

The WAAS focused their attention on the representation of motherhood in the National Gallery collection, and the experience of people in pregnancy and breastfeeding, within the gallery itself.

The project involved working with a group of participants that included people in pregnancy, a doula, a new mother and a grandmother, exploring how they related to both the institutional space and the collection. In response to the research time and the parameters of the SAFEDI commission, The WAAS developed a game—a performative score—that allowed participants to play in the gallery space.

**"During this time, we became used to the space, feeling at home there and developing a sense of our own agency within it. We took pictures of ourselves rather than the paintings, installing ourselves in the collection. We used the toilets to change into smart suits and experimented with walking through the space as if we had a role beyond that of the public. We took more pictures than people normally do and examined them more closely."**

**The WAAS**

The artists also made several site visits on their own, where they mapped and explored the images of mothers and babies and feeding in the National Gallery collection.

These actions often drew the attention of the attendants, revealing the invisible, unspoken rules of engagement that create the spatial narrative of institutions such as the National Gallery. Much of their work explores the issues of permission and validation within the art world. They have another artwork, for example, called 'A Visit by the Officials from the Bureau for the Validation of Art' where they confer applicants with an authenticating stamp for their activities or artworks. The issue of validation is particularly relevant to this national space, because as Dixon noted, 'there are few spaces more validating than the National Gallery. When I told my parents about working at the National, they listened for a full 3 or 4 minutes'.

So, it is significant that although the work took place in the National Gallery, it was not commissioned by them and did not form part of their official programme of events. The WAAS made it clear that they 'accessed no resources from the gallery other than what was freely available to the general public and our formal status remained that of a member of the public throughout.'

In our meetings, the artists described having had discussions with the National Gallery about their work, and that the gallery were interested, particularly in understanding more about motherhood and its relation to their collection. The WAAS developed a proposal for a mother-centred performance within the gallery, to take place outside of opening hours. At this point, it emerged that artworks within the National are commissioned by a separate programming team from the artists' contacts, and thus a pivot was required.

The WAAS response was 'to continue to investigate the gallery and collection from the public realm and to produce and execute the artwork uninvited by the gallery. We utilised our right to be in the space as members of the public. Obeying the rules set out by the gallery yet engaging with the space in a different way than "tourists".'

So, they politely carried on creating an unannounced artwork called The Milky Way.

## *Anna Macdonald*

**annamacdonaldart.co.uk**

Anna Macdonald is a dance artist/scholar whose work moves between moving image and live practice. She is interested in the relationship between the body, time and affect and her work is regularly exhibited in both festival and gallery settings. Anna specialises in working with the public and has spent the last ten years developing models for participatory and embodied research that foregrounds lived experience. Her practice has generated interdisciplinary findings in the fields of health, science and law, within large-scale projects funded by AHRC, Arts Council England and Wellcome Trust. She is currently course leader for MA Performance: Society at UAL: Central St Martins.

## *The WAAS*

### thewaas.org/

The Women's Art Activation System (The WAAS) is an artist collective that makes live art, performance and socially engaged artworks. Working with humour they make rituals & processes that enquire into, and shift, established social power dynamics.

Principal artists Sharon Bennett and Sarah Dixon are representatives for Pregnancy and Mothering on the Disconnected Bodies Arts Advisory Board and were invited to participate in a round table discussion entitled "Care as a Collective Responsibility" at the Future Collect Conference Handle with Care hosted by Manchester Art Gallery and Iniva. The WAAS were commissioned to work with Axisweb, Social Art Network and Manchester Metropolitan University on Social Art for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (SAFEDI) funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

Other works include interactive performance A Visit by the Officials from the Bureau for the Validation of Art performed at the Grace Exhibition Space in New York via Zoom, and at arts festivals in Oxford, Manchester, London and Stroud. The Baby Makers is a series of facilitated workshops for women in pregnancy and post-birth funded by the National Lottery Community Fund. In The Baby Makers: Making History, The WAAS collaborated with Museum in the Park, Stroud to create a collective artwork with local mothers that will be housed in the museum's permanent collection.

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