

A Visual Arts Strategy for the West Midlands 2020 — 2025

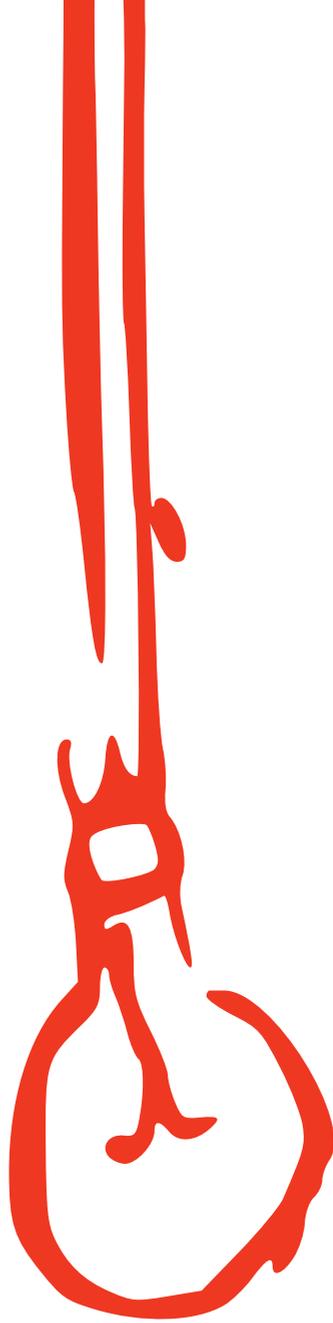
NO
LIMITS

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Foreword



NO LIMITS is a visual arts strategy for the West Midlands. It has been initiated by New Art West Midlands in response to the needs of the sector, and developed as an effective working plan. It has been informed by the region's network of artists, curators and arts professionals, educators, audiences and stakeholders from business and local government.

In the development of this strategy, we used an artist-led consulting process to explore the breadth of visual arts practice. This process was designed to engage the people in the room rapidly and connect them and their voices into the strategy. Deliberately pushing out from the urban centres, we toured the region to ensure its diversity would be reflected. We sought out the far and distant places that make the visual arts in the West Midlands distinct, and looked at our relevance beyond the limits of our art form and our sector.

Our six 'expeditions' covered much ground, ranging from the role of the artist in developing our changing cityscapes, to art as a means of social engagement in rural communities and healthcare settings. We reflected on our cultural gems – our galleries, our museums, tourism and heritage – and the new frontiers of the digital and public realms.

The resulting strategy has been led and drafted by artist and consultant Simon Poulter, with an overarching aim to safeguard the future of West Midlands' artists and our sector as a whole. Operating within the wider context, including Arts Council England's forthcoming 10 year strategy, we hope the actions that emerge across the four themes will create positive impact for the West Midlands in two principle ways:

- to develop and attract artists and curators from a range of disciplines to the region, retaining them and recognising their value.
- to respond to the needs of regional priorities and contribute to the development of the West Midlands in respect of creativity and innovation.

Diversity underpins the strategy, relating to our creative people, pioneering practices and distinctive places. Together, we want to support artists at every stage of their career, as part of a shared commitment to creating an ecology that values and celebrates the visual arts as an essential part of people's lives in the West Midlands.

Craig Ashley
Director, New Art West Midlands
October 2019

No Limits: A Working Strategy



'The visual arts and creative industries are changing. Artists need to examine themselves in the marketplace even if they reject what they find.'

Simon Poulter, artist & consultant

A visual arts strategy needs to be an open document that can be shared and adapted by artists and cultural workers. It needs to work from evidence to inspiration (and vice versa), actively listening to people who work in the visual arts and then translating that into action.

This strategy sits within a variety of contexts. Some of these are common internationally and in the UK, others are discrete and particular to the region. The strategy recognises the work achieved to date by the network of individuals and organisations who make up the visual arts sector, factoring in the insights of New Art West Midlands' staff and advisors.

Finer grain insights show how the West Midlands can grow. As a productive creative industries region, the visual arts play an important role but we are a sector often overlooked due to our divergent qualities. Divergence is among our key strengths, bringing creativity and innovation, and so better coordination and coherency is needed to articulate our value.

As the region's contemporary visual arts network, New Art West Midlands has brokered powerful collaborations with our Higher Education partners; they are at the forefront of sector leadership across the four themes of the strategy. As key allies, they will play a critical role in delivering success against our shared objectives, collaborating

to measure the impact of our work, and each leading on a strategy theme.

 **Artists Reflect Society
Coventry University**

 **Artists Underpin Industry
Birmingham City University**

 **Artists Shape Place
University of Worcester**

 **Artists Support Artists
University of Wolverhampton**

As a strategic response from the network, together we will work to address matters of equity in the sector, to better represent and reflect the diverse talent of a diverse region, and to take advantage of an expanded marketplace in which the visual arts and artists can flourish.

Artists Reflect Society



'A lack of visible diverse leadership has a direct correlation with a lack of cultural participation by diverse communities.'

Lara Ratnaraja and Helga Henry,
Re:Present Leadership Programme

The West Midlands is distinctive as a diverse region of the UK. Artists and arts professionals from under-represented backgrounds are less likely to achieve success at the highest level due to the narrow pathways into organised professional development support. Ongoing failure to develop diversity in our artists and arts professionals when it comes to sector leadership will result in a visual arts sector that is mono-cultural, and as a consequence, inhibit the development of diverse audiences. The strategy calls on the region to locate itself as the UK exemplar for inclusivity across the visual arts, forging itself as a thought leader and 'shaper' to other regions, creating momentum and methods that facilitate opportunity and change at all levels.

Together we will:

- Lobby for and celebrate the promotion of candidates from under-represented backgrounds into leadership roles, with an ambition for our sector to reflect the profile of the West Midlands.
- Increase access to opportunities for artists and arts professionals from under-represented backgrounds, collaborating to remove the barriers to access and widen understanding among those who carry cultural power and influence.
- Raise awareness of intersectionality, understanding that access to the cultural economy can be denied through multiple sources of disadvantage including race, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion and disability.
- Recognise and support the role of champions in the region (as practitioners and mentors), increasing awareness of public funding opportunities to support artists and arts professionals from under-represented backgrounds to achieve success at the highest level.
- Encourage artists to be bold and radical in the creation of work that reflects our cultures, creating discursive and transactional spaces for people to exchange ideas that support cohesion in our communities and work across established boundaries and frontiers.

Outcome



What does it look like?

The West Midlands becomes the most diverse visual arts region in the UK, with demonstrable evaluation systems and tools in place in the period 2020 – 2025.

How do we measure it?

Create an open evaluation framework to benchmark the present case against the strategy period (2020 – 2025), using qualitative and quantitative tools to measure impact.

Who will lead it? Coventry University

Leadership case study

Coventry University is working in partnership with Coventry City of Culture Trust to deliver Youthful Leaders. Funded by Arts Council England through a Transforming Leadership award, the programme will support a diverse group of established, independent and emerging leaders to take part in a two-and-a-half-year leadership programme, as part of the legacy for UK City of Culture 2021. Aiming to diversify and strengthen the leadership of Coventry's cultural organisations, museums and libraries, the cohort will co-create a management training programme to help nurture a new generation of cultural entrepreneurs who represent and reflect the city of Coventry. Led by Coventry City of Culture Trust, the partners include Coventry University, People Make It Work, Warwick Arts Centre, CUSE CIC, Beatfrees Collective and TRG Arts.

coventry2021.co.uk

Artists Underpin Industry



'The Creative Industries grew at twice the rate of the wider economy in 2015-2016.

The sector is now worth £91.8bn in Gross Value Added (GVA) to the UK.'

Creative Industries Federation

The West Midlands has undergone considerable political change. A new Combined Authority for the West Midlands conurbation has seen the election of our first Metro Mayor. With large urban centres and sprawling rural areas, the geography of the region encompasses six Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) with a remit to increase investment, stimulate growth and support business. Digital and culture sit at the heart of our regional regeneration, with the STEAM agenda making a compelling case for the integration of art in industry; a vital component alongside science, technology, engineering and maths. The strategy calls on the region to articulate the value and role of the visual arts within the burgeoning creative industries, maximising the opportunities for artists to work in an expanded field.

Together we will:

- Position the visual arts as a cornerstone of what we now call the creative industries, connecting artists to growth and jobs and enriching the portfolio career as a model for creative practitioners.
- Seize the opportunity of devolution in local government to raise the flag for the visual arts, demonstrating its value as part of the wider case for the creative industries in terms of lifestyle, health and economic impact.

→ Engage the Combined Authority and Metro Mayor in the development of a creative industries plan and, in partnership with others across the arts, connect into the West Midlands Industrial Strategy.

→ Connect the output of arts graduates to skills and enterprise as part of a broader talent pipeline for the region, linking digital, maker and visual art sectors through strategic partnerships with Further and Higher Education.

→ Provide affordable studio spaces across the West Midlands region, bolstering the foundations of our creative industries sector and retaining talent through vital support at the outset of creative careers.

Outcome



What does it look like?

The West Midlands develops an integrated creative industries plan linking artists, arts organisations, arts graduates, universities, makers and the digital sector.

How do we measure it?

Create an open evaluation framework to benchmark the present case against the strategy period (2020 - 2025), using qualitative and quantitative tools to measure impact.

Who will lead it? Birmingham City University

Leadership case study

STEAMhouse is a centre for creative innovation and cultural production, which brings together Arts and STEM approaches. Developed by Birmingham City University in partnership with Eastside Projects, and funded by the European Regional Development Fund and Arts Council England, STEAMhouse opened on Digbeth High Street in 2018. Alongside co-working and events space, STEAMhouse houses one of the UK's best equipped makerspaces with equipment and specialist technicians to support production and prototyping in a variety of materials across digital, wood, metal and print. Through a lively programme of public events, business support and workshops, STEAMhouse offers a wide range of support focussed on exploring new ideas and the development of new products and services, which artists and arts organisations produce in the form of artworks, arts projects and creative services.

steamhouse.org.uk

Artists Shape Place



A PLACE TO
START CHANGING
THE WORLD
FROM

'For those of us working on this biennial, we have had the opportunity to think about the future and its many possible shapes, sizes and perspectives.'

Ryan Hughes, Founder and Artistic Director, Coventry Biennial of Contemporary Art

The Midlands Engine concept is defined around economic development, transport and innovation. Most often these themes sit within an industrial growth context, but they can be reframed around culture, creativity and artistic practice. Significant cultural moments during the timeframe of this strategy will change the perceptions of the West Midlands, and the visual arts have an important role to play. At the same time, large scale infrastructure developments will factor the role of culture and the artist in the making of space. The strategy calls on the region to value the role of the artist beyond the limits of the visual arts sector, acknowledging the divergent nature of the artist's vision in the research and development of place shaping programmes.

Together we will:

- Broker purposeful collaborations for artists and arts organisations to engage in infrastructure projects, encouraging a cross-sector approach to increase investment potential through research, business, enterprise and regeneration funds.
- Develop models for artist-based research and development as a defined method of practice, enabling artists and arts organisations to co-locate around the Midlands Engine concept, connecting to

other sectors (for example design, health, social policy) and expanding commissioning opportunities.

- Connect our Further and Higher Education arts graduates to business and enterprise (through the creative industries agenda), widening the application of graduate talent and skills with artists acknowledged as creators of opportunities and cultural change.
- Increase access to new technologies for artists in the region, developing connections with business and universities working in this space to add value.
- Seize the growth opportunities presented during the strategy period (2020-2025), among them:
 - ACAVA Studios - Spode Works (Stoke 2020)
 - Birmingham Smithfield (2019 - 34)
 - British Art Show 9 (Wolverhampton 2021)
 - Commonwealth Games (Birmingham 2022)
 - Herefordshire's a Great Place (2017 - 20)
 - High Speed Rail (Bham and Solihull 2026)
 - Midland Met Hospital (Sandwell 2022)
 - The Arches Project (Worcester 2018 - 22)
 - UK City of Culture (Coventry 2021)
- Build an evidence base to show the value and impact of the visual arts within a broader cultural landscape, observing models of artist-based research and development in practice and measuring success through rigorous study.

Outcome



A PLACE TO
START CHANGING
THE WORLD
FROM

What does it look like?

The West Midlands visual arts network increases investment from other sources, broadens opportunities for artists and establishes an innovative cross-sector research and development culture with partners.

How do we measure it?

Create an open evaluation framework to benchmark the present case against the strategy period (2020 - 2025), using qualitative and quantitative tools to measure impact.

Who will lead it? University of Worcester

Leadership case study

Worcester's railway arches are set to be transformed into a major new cultural destination for the city, providing a hub for business and creative skills development. As part of Worcester Cultural Partnership, the University of Worcester is working to create a new key gateway for the city, transforming the area into a workplace for creative industries and a cultural destination for tourists and local communities. A leadership and entrepreneurial skills programme will encourage graduates and other aspiring arts practitioners to seek pathways into employment and business start-up, with new jobs being created and training places offered. Supported by an award from DCMS through the Cultural Development Fund, the project is led by a partnership comprising Worcester City Council, The University of Worcester, Severn Art, Network Rail, Worcestershire Arts Partnership, Worcestershire County Council and local businesses.

thearchesworcester.co.uk

Artists Support Artists

ARTISTS COME TOGETHER
FROM DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS
+ JOIN FORCES



'You may not want to change the system but to produce another one.'

Gavin Wade, Eastside Projects

The work of networks such as New Art West Midlands has deepened and increased the role of peer interaction across the region. It has also supported criticality, in the commissioning of new art writing and curatorial development for example. Moving forward, continuous professional development needs to be framed within a resilience context of employability and new opportunities to apply creative skills beyond the museum and gallery sector. The strategy calls on the region to enable our communities of artists to prosper and contribute to society.

Together we will:

- Develop an expanded professional development offer for arts undergraduates across the region, working collectively with universities to bring investment – a survival tool kit for graduates, supporting retention and the development of core business skills.
 - Collaborate to harness our expertise, combining our resources to benefit artists at all stages through an expanded network and achieving fair access to development programmes through a collegiate approach to sector support.
 - Create time and space for peer interaction and knowledge transfer between artists, connecting with national and international contexts for enhanced professional development and career progression – a platform to share experiences, take risks and develop new work.
- Foster new writing to lead on the thinking and action around inclusion, framing art criticism and theory in wider social and cultural contexts (for example, the effects of austerity on disabled artists in the region).
 - Encourage work in communities (as well as exhibition spaces) to broaden cultural ecologies and dialogue, taking on social and cultural issues that engage with communities of interest, and fostering understanding about how artists work.
 - Advocate for investment in key people to support arts development, beyond local government frameworks or their absence, and evidence the impact on audience development in partnership with the leading galleries in the region.
 - Provide affordable studio spaces across the West Midlands region, bolstering the foundations of our creative industries sector and retaining talent through vital support at the outset of creative careers.

Outcome

ARTISTS COME TOGETHER
FROM DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS
+ JOIN FORCES



What does it look like?

Ambitious in creating more opportunities across the region, tailored to fit artists at all career stages, bold in forming new conversations with communities, businesses and universities.

How do we measure it?

Create an open evaluation framework to benchmark the present case against the strategy period (2020 – 2025), using qualitative and quantitative tools to measure impact.

Who will lead it? University of Wolverhampton

Leadership case study

Wolverhampton will play host to the British Art Show 9 (BAS 9) between February and May 2021, with the exhibition taking place across Wolverhampton Art Gallery and the University of Wolverhampton's School of Art. Acknowledged as one of the most important recurrent exhibitions of contemporary art produced in this country, BAS 9 is unrivalled in its scope and national reach. Wolverhampton is one of four cities involved in the exhibition, alongside Manchester, Aberdeen and Plymouth. The last iteration attracted over 300,000 visitors in its tour between 2015 and 2017, and its legacy has been seen to increase investment for the visual arts in the cities it visits. BAS 9 presents an opportunity for Wolverhampton and the Black Country. Alongside Coventry as UK City of Culture 2021 and Birmingham as host to the Commonwealth Games 2022, it signifies a new era of growth for the cultural and creative sector industries in the West Midlands, bringing with it the creation of jobs and opportunities.

For the previous iteration of the British Art Show visit britishartshow8.com



Next steps:
A response from
New Art
West Midlands

This strategy will inform the direction of New Art West Midlands, shaping our work around the longer-term priorities of the region's visual arts sector. The actions identified here, across the four key themes, will broaden our horizons and our ambition. Diversity in and the diversification of practice and career pathways can help to create resilient artists, and a sector that moves closer to reflecting our region.

The future aspirations of New Art West Midlands, as an agent and advocate for sector development, are supported by this plan. As a network, we will use it. We will reference it. We will share it and encourage others to do the same.

Positioning New Art West Midlands as a progressive advocate of creativity nationally, our programmes and our actions will respond to the need identified through the strategy themes. We will work to deliver the outcomes alongside our partners in Higher Education and the arts. We will make a framework that supports artists' journeys, from early career to established, working beyond the limits we have previously observed. Among the areas for development:

→ **New ways of working**

Developing a business plan for the period 2020 – 25 that will put the network in the best position, maintaining our work and a capacity to deliver.

→ **New collaborations**

Shaping our professional development offer to connect artists with expertise, fostering new conversations to create new opportunities in step with a changing sector.

→ **New platforms**

Supporting activity where there is a clear need, working together as a region to close the gaps in sector development and take advantage of opportunities to grow.

→ **New knowledge**

Brokering collaborations between Higher Education and the arts, increasing investment in artists and curators, and evidencing public impact through rigorous study.

→ **New writing**

Building a wider base for perspectives from across the region, advocating for the visual arts and our relevance, and increasing our visibility beyond the sector alone.



Diversity & Diversification



Writing the visual arts strategy for the West Midlands has involved holding six meetings across the region, working under the banner of 'The Outer Limits' and conversations with other key people in the region in the period September to November 2017.

We based the title on the original 1960s American TV show, as a way to talk about the West Midlands as a place where creative people can dream and fantasise, creating other realities.

The themes and terms of the meetings were deliberately broad and we were able to pull in a wide range of artist practitioners, curators, academics and students. In all we have spoken to around 80 people and have strong evidence of various concerns in the region. These include artists being paid for what they do - like other professionals - and acknowledging the need for opportunities for mid-career artists and the value of ongoing peer mentoring in developing practice.

We know too that the West Midlands is more than just Birmingham and other surrounding cities; it includes rural areas and smaller towns such as Shrewsbury where organisations like DASH do work both regionally and nationally 'with extraordinary artists'.

Two of these 'extraordinary artists', Noëmi Lakmaier and Anne Whitehurst, joined us to explore 'otherness' and the political aspects of their work. How do artists deal with disabilities against a backdrop of austerity? In Anne's case she has moved to activism, while Noëmi has created striking installations that invite in 'the gaze'.

The culture of making and manufacturing strikes through in the research and the

strategy - the West Midlands is the historic centre of the industrial age but it is also reinventing itself around innovation, making and R&D. There are many opportunities for artists to be an important part of the social, cultural and economic fabric of the region. The development of STEAMhouse in the West Midlands has been one step in creating a focal point for artist makers across the region, aimed at increasing new skills and forms of making.

The two central planks of the visual arts strategy are diversity and diversification. In the first instance the West Midlands has driven and will continue to drive the diversity agenda, in welcoming people into the visual arts and the arts in general. There are initiatives underway to create diverse leaders, demonstrate new practice and encourage more participation. But this needs to be seized by a broader coalition of people making change happen at all levels. This is something that New Art West Midlands can broker.

The visual arts strategy for the West Midlands goes further and sets out a challenge - the West Midlands can become the most diverse arts region in the UK at all levels - leadership, artistic work, encouragement of young people and retention of arts graduates. In order to do this it needs to benchmark the current position and evaluate across a 5 year period, working in partnership with key organisations such as Arts Council England and its funded National Portfolio Organisations. In the process it needs to identify the barriers to access that exist and move its centre of gravity towards openness.

The diversification agenda within the visual arts strategy proposes that artists and arts organisations can become a part of wealth creation in the widest sense. We now talk about cultural ecologies and intersectionality and the West Midlands has this potential unlike other regions to work across systems, sectors and networks. This can be seen in terms of quality of life, reflective practice and the need for innovation to be framed to include the creative industries.

Innovation and research and development are central to the 'Midlands Engine' concept and are often connected to the automotive industry, science and transport. But these words apply to artists and cultural workers too, with a need to cut across Higher Education, the funded arts sector and the commercial sector of the creative industries.

To do this of course will require new strategies, partnerships and lobbying in the right places. Arts Council England has been bold in creating new National Portfolio Organisations such as Birmingham Open Media, Friction Arts, Centrala, Grand Union and Vivid Projects. The hub effect of Digbeth continues as a success story and proof that investment in the new visual arts infrastructure can grow arts practice and confidence.

The arts are changing, and as public subsidy dries up at a local level, artists tell us that they do exist on very low incomes. It is now becoming essential for artists to explore other 'portfolio' career options to sustain their practice. To be clear, the visual arts strategy is not arguing for every artist to become a business-person but it is making a case for creative people to be recognised as a part of

the Midlands Engine story. Furthermore, we know from our research that the Midlands is producing a high number of arts graduates who need work and opportunities in order to stay in the region.

The attractiveness of the West Midlands to work and study is evident - where else can you get things made with such a broad range of processes - from glass to ceramics and new technologies? Going further, the explosion of the maker culture makes the region a natural area to locate a small creative business. This is what we have found from the research carried out in places such as Stoke-on-Trent and Coventry.

The city of Coventry will hold its second biennial in October 2019, an event that will bring together artists from all over the UK and internationally. As Coventry builds capacity to deliver UK City of Culture in 2021, there are huge opportunities to underpin the creative industries across the West Midlands and bring things into focus. The opportunities must be for the many and not just the few (to coin a phrase) and for Coventry, along with the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham in 2022, there will be investment to scale up ambitions and audiences for new artwork.

The visual arts strategy acknowledges that partnerships between curators, artists and local authorities are going to be integral to make things happen on the ground, with the involvement too of universities and businesses. This involves both commitment and trust.

Academics and artists feel there is a time-bomb awaiting the visual arts, as Higher Education in the arts becomes a preserve for those that can afford it. But working in the

creative industries can be open to anyone and the big ticket events, such as Coventry 2021, will inspire and attract new people in.

During our research period, we heard stories of artists from working class backgrounds who have made change happen in their communities and are committed to engagement practice as a part of their working process. We also know that making work for its own sake is important and that resources to support diverse artists, such as Developing Your Creative Practice – an Arts Council England fund – are imperative in gaining confidence and support for practitioners.

Overall, the visual arts strategy for the West Midlands is a document that can only work with multiple partnerships and determination to change methods, not least to open up dialogues outside of the sector. New Art West Midlands is well positioned to build capacity and move on many of these ideas but it needs this to be led by diversity and diversification.

Simon Poulter
September 2019



The following text is edited from a transcript of 'The Outer Limits', a series of six consultation events that took place across the autumn of 2017. Here we explored the breadth of the visual arts in the West Midlands, and the concerns occupying artists and the wider the sector. Facilitated by artist Simon Poulter, keynote speakers catalysed the debate before we handed over to the people in the room to respond. Around 80 people attended, engaging in discussion and giving insight into current practice across the region. These were some of the words that were used. They give a flavour of the conversations that were had, and the evidence that underpins the strategy.

Edited by Anneka French

STOKE-ON-TRENT

'Setting the scene'

AirSpace Gallery

Tuesday 19 September 2017

How to be successful as an artist. This event focused on the raw materials and engine of being 'successful' in artistic practice. We looked at core concerns for artists at all career stages, including insights by practising artists. What does a good gig look like? How do we 'Play Nicely' in the art world and get proper reward and contracting for what we do? What rates of pay are current and workable for artists in the market place? We were joined by Ryan Hughes (Director,

Coventry Biennial of Contemporary Art) and Dan Thompson (artist, writer, speaker) to discuss these matters.

- ✿ Being in the West Midlands as an artist is about working and living.
- ✿ Working class artists and those who have come from a non-arts degree background can demonstrate a route towards activism and collectivisation.
- ✿ Paying an artist for what they do is as important as paying a plumber. It is a profession.
- ✿ Trustafarian artists are more common and they take up a share of the action.
- ✿ Organising a skateboard event (coming from a council house background) can take you all the way to organising a biennial for a city.
- ✿ When a local authority backs a young person with a bit of money, this can have surprising impact and build social capital beyond the sum involved.
- ✿ Knowing people can make more things happen.
- ✿ The open day is a catchment point, it is a high value item for engagement.
- ✿ Arts projects can be relational to the city.
- ✿ Diminishing public and social space is a problem in the West Midlands.
- ✿ The art teacher said 'Don't do art' - the person recounting the story did and does do art.
- ✿ Hourly paid lecturing is drying up, people are staying put in their teaching jobs.
- ✿ Digbeth First Friday is useful, I will pick up a day's work.
- ✿ Not enough prep at art school stage (for younger artists).
- ✿ I think art's needed more than ever.
- ✿ Mid-career support needed.
- ✿ (Art) profession is valued idealistically if not financially.
- ✿ Parts of the broken city are available.

- ✿ More time for self-care (compared to London).
- ✿ Leaving London is seen as defeatist (by my peers).
- ✿ Council will say 'yes' to things (in Stoke-on-Trent).
- ✿ Artists struggle with the idea that they are owed something.
- ✿ If you are an artist you make work.
- ✿ You can't be a project manager and make art.
- ✿ We design our programme around our interests.
- ✿ I look to artist-led spaces for new art and projects.
- ✿ We love our city.
- ✿ Ikon started as an artist-led space.
- ✿ AirSpace has become my important community.
- ✿ We need more than two hours (of this kind of process i.e. live consulting).
- ✿ When do you become a mid-career artist? Or do you become a multitasking person?
- ✿ How do you move from surviving to doing okay?
- ✿ Good mental health is as important as a good economic starting point.
- ✿ How artists are valued is a good starting point, not losing the intrinsic value.
- ✿ There is a relationship between fabricators and artists in the West Midlands.
- ✿ One thing is to get private sector businesses to understand the cultural sector.

SHREWSBURY

'F@ck this Sh/t'

The Hive

Wednesday 20 September 2017

How to take on the universe and make it listen. We explored the context of how artists respond to fundamental shifts in the political space, examples of disobedience and the fakery of the 'disruptive' economy.

This session was about marginality, voices of otherness and was an opportunity to contextualise artistic practice as a response. We invited artists to debate and devise beyond the social media silos, with opening talks by prominent artists Noëmi Lakmaier and Ann Whitehurst.

- ✿ Being political is important.
- ✿ Concerned with the dismantling of the welfare state (as a disabled person).
- ✿ We find it difficult to get things going (in North Staffordshire).
- ✿ We have to fight for anything.
- ✿ The Labour MP is right wing.
- ✿ I see (activism) as a part of my practice.
- ✿ Benefits are not enough to live on.
- ✿ We would like to get a building and give skills to people.
- ✿ Stoke-on-Trent was Brexit capital.
- ✿ Heart of Glass in St Helens supported me to make a project (Arts Council England (ACE), Creative People and Places (CPP)).
- ✿ An empowerment approach is needed.
- ✿ Leadership in the sector needed (i.e. arts and disability).
- ✿ Always on the cliff edge of falling apart.
- ✿ Went down traditional Fine Art route, confronting people with a non-normative body.
- ✿ People just want a spectacular image.
- ✿ We need to organise support to do the work we do.
- ✿ I am ambitious.
- ✿ Support from Unlimited shifted gap between artists at different career points.
- ✿ We set up a collective studio group.
- ✿ Things come together and fall part at the same time.
- ✿ Sometimes we have to do a lot of work for no money.

- How did someone find out about Disability Arts Shropshire (DASH)? She called directory enquiries.
- Class system says art is not for you.
- Sometimes people don't want to be trapped.

BIRMINGHAM

'Out there'

Vivid Projects

Friday 6 October 2017

We explored the Outer Limits of digital space and the current thinking in digital culture. What mixed reality methods lie in wait for the artists of the new millennium? How can we bust through barriers to make new tools have some meaning? This session explored next generation 'radical' art, physical and digital realities - what is out there to be explored? Artists discussed tape machines, VR as painting, sci-art, bio-art, coding, experience design and user interaction. We had two speakers on board for this mission - Gina Czarnecki and Laurie Ramsell.

- The phrase 'hybrid practices' has been stolen by the bio-art community.
- The human genome project.
- Worked with dancers, programmers and scientists at different levels of collaboration.
- Scientists need public engagement (to get funding).
- Filmed an autopsy.
- Talking about ethical code.
- Cells can be harvested and grown.
- Guy's Hospital has a collection of 200 years of human remains. Can't be shown.
- Grey areas of legislation. No ethics groups would get involved.
- Started an art and ethics panel.

- The Human Tissue Act - patient request.
- What is the important - where the art gets made?
- John Hunt (co-author) 3D skin portraits.
- Imperial College get their skin from penises.
- The project was about narcissism, surface and appearance.
- Identified that I was interested in what it meant to be human.
- Once we start to alter or augment things how does that play into ideas of what a human is?
- Four projects: trans-humanism, post-humanism, hybrid human animals and virtual animals.
- Story of the monocolus - artificial creature, test tube baby, grown with alchemical equipment, interested in going into how we would label or think about a human.
- Was made through untraditional means, 3D bio-printed, take a human embryo and insert into a pig.
- Technology is moving towards a place where humans are born in different ways.
- 25 million people are born today from IVF. Born form 'unnatural' means.
- The idea of the monocolus was born from a recipe. Grow Your Own Human came from idea of material evolution.
- 1000BC, leaves decomposing, snakes were an evolution of worms.
- Semen entered a woman and then a human emerged.
- Material evolution.
- 'Alt-human'.
- Being a person and a legal human have not always been synonymous.
- Conversely we have ascribed non-human personhood to things.
- Buildings non-human legal status, e.g. river in New Zealand.
- Interesting that white Western men labelling what was human and not.

- 🔥 Who defines what is human or trans-human?
- 🔥 Dualism between handmade and technology / thing / soul - whether a soul can be ascribed to things made by technology.
- 🔥 Looking at reasons people give for being human.
- 🔥 If you were to take a blended idea, the human part counts as only 10%.
- 🔥 Emotions and rationality - shown that the way people think about what they do is from evolution.
- 🔥 Crayfish given anti-depressants.
- 🔥 We can map the genome but we don't know what they do, creating mutant zebra fish.
- 🔥 Allowing humans to fix embryos.
- 🔥 Pictures of mermaids at the university.
- 🔥 Making a living sculpture, half-human-half-fish.
- 🔥 Bacterial cellulose, human hair and fish juices.
- 🔥 Genes from tobacco plants into tomato plants to make them grow all year round.
- 🔥 As an artist you can be a bit fringe about how you work.
- 🔥 No point bringing on more artists if there's nowhere for them to go.
- 🔥 Wellcome Trust is the biggest funder of art in this area.
- 🔥 Playing Nicely.
- 🔥 a-n paying artists guidelines.
- 🔥 Issue about training young people to creatively talk about things.
- 🔥 Students in art didn't know what the Holocaust was.
- 🔥 College is a social space, learning skills.
- 🔥 Started a practice without using computers.
- 🔥 Negotiated a practice as a design, independent practitioner.
- 🔥 Birmingham Centre for Media Arts (became Vivid then Vivid Projects).
- 🔥 Surrounded by people still doing that BT call centre job.
- 🔥 I fill sandwiches for a living - I want to learn how

to draw better (young black artist from Leicester).

- 🔥 Birmingham City Council has a creative industries strategy.
- 🔥 STEAMhouse is opening, looking at other people and working with their skills and ideas.
- 🔥 I want to be able to get into a position where I can collaborate with another organisation.
- 🔥 Nobody believed anybody would make a living out of it (being an artist).
- 🔥 It's a really personal thing about trust.

WORCESTER

'Bring it on'

Worcester Arts Workshop Thursday 12 October 2017

You live in the West Midlands, you want to stay but what opportunities are there? In this session we invited artists and arts educators to explore the elephant in the room - retention of talent. This was a rapid build satellite session discussing recent development initiatives, new commissions, access to technical resources and partnerships across business, the funded sector and arts education. We heard opening talks by self-organisers Emma Chetcuti and Lara Ratnaraja who framed the discussion on how to sustain practice where you are. We also heard about the problems artists face in working in the region.

- 🔥 Wanted to see what talent was out there.
- 🔥 People leave things to the last minute.
- 🔥 You need to have your radar switched on.
- 🔥 We are looking for artists working in photography.
- 🔥 New Art West Midlands as a network.
- 🔥 Be alert, be aware of what's going on.

- ✿ Run two leadership programmes representing diverse artists.
- ✿ Invisible disabilities explored as a theme.
- ✿ Eastside Projects and Digbeth First Friday.
- ✿ Meeting people is really important.
- ✿ Centrala is a good example - a couple set it up, put things on they wanted, they liked.
- ✿ Justin Wiggins artist working with Blue Light challenge.
- ✿ Start building up profile using local infrastructure.
- ✿ Developing connections with councillors and MPs, thinking about who you need to know.
- ✿ Normal people would come if anybody bothered to invite them (Digbeth First Friday).
- ✿ I've got friends who feel intimidated by going to private views, but with Digbeth First Friday not the case.
- ✿ One of the worst things is the interaction of the networks.
- ✿ Ask for money, get advice or ask for advice?
- ✿ In Sandwell there aren't traditional art going audiences, we build audiences by working with stories.
- ✿ We are making with, for and about people's lives – when the work is made they participate and come back.
- ✿ Developing a new programme, where the audience becomes the artist and makes work with us.
- ✿ We archive our work seriously.
- ✿ Local people are the ones that make the work, it is your responsibility as artists to record these responses.
- ✿ Audience is a crucial part of your development as practitioners.
- ✿ When would you see this level of work - National Trust, Meadow Arts.
- ✿ People always think about exhibiting, not

working in communities.

- ✿ Looking at issues around gun and knife crime working with artists (in Birmingham).
- ✿ Increasingly, you have the internet - use your platforms.
- ✿ Don't just connect with the networks that are your networks.
- ✿ Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) interested in heritage and community.
- ✿ Seeing work in progress is really interesting.
- ✿ People love seeing behind the scenes, for example theatre.
- ✿ People are interested in hearing about practice.
- ✿ Anyone can have an idea, it takes time to realise it.
- ✿ What did you ask us to do, organise a revolution?
- ✿ Careers do change over time.
- ✿ I haven't got time to follow everyone in the world!
- ✿ More interested in artists that are not following a conventional route.
- ✿ Not waiting for permission.
- ✿ Copy the uncopiable.
- ✿ Portfolio careers really important to get across to graduates.
- ✿ Established artists who have never had an experience of making a work for a public space?
- ✿ Also recognising that it's an Arts Centre ... how valuable to work in an arts location, doing things behind the scenes.

WALSALL

'Far Out-ness'

The New Art Gallery Walsall

Friday 13 October 2017

'Far out-ness' is commonly associated with the post WW2 avant garde and jazz movements. Within this session we invited people to discuss the position of art-making

in the brave new world. This event was all about practice, presentation and making. We contextualised how West Midlands-based artists can shape and form their practice and process. What contexts are now available to artists? Gallery, web or public space? Our two speakers – Ruth Catlow and Gavin Wade - focused vanguard debates and we connected with the talent in the room. The event particularly suited early career, emerging and hybrid practitioners (artist curators for example) and was live streamed.

- ✿ People are interested in hearing about practice.
- ✿ Anyone can have an idea, it takes time to realise it.
- ✿ Strong effect on employment.
- ✿ I am trying to get his people to come in (visitor).
- ✿ Maybe the exhibition model is outdated?
- ✿ Maybe the exhibitions I do make the audience complicit?
- ✿ Maybe the front could be looked at (i.e. at The New Art Gallery Walsall among others). There are barriers to coming in to galleries.
- ✿ We come loaded with expectations from history and the past.
- ✿ We are trying to challenge that at The New Art Gallery Walsall. Even though we are doing this it is still a massive challenge.
- ✿ Cultural barriers and language barriers.
- ✿ Education policy an issue.
- ✿ The people who aren't coming, it is our job to send a message to the government.
- ✿ The fact that the arts are being scrapped from the curriculum is important.
- ✿ When we took to the web, we were able to produce things for almost nothing.
- ✿ 20% of the money in the economy is financial services.

- ✿ We are going to think through these issues and create a creative commons.
- ✿ You vote for someone, you are handing over power to that person.
- ✿ You choose to be an artist.
- ✿ You are confident in your belief ... part of our statement is we don't make art for the public - we are the public (Eastside Projects).
- ✿ The question is now we don't have the surplus that we once had, how do we argue for the value of that ... what's the economy of this?
- ✿ It's not there isn't a surplus, choices have been made around the surplus.
- ✿ Art and the arts are not part of the education system.
- ✿ The block chain is the underpinning of bitcoin ... digital money and transaction.
- ✿ How changes in technology are changing things on the ground.
- ✿ Computer scientists making decisions about how things change ... trying to make things more available.
- ✿ Plantoid artwork referred to ... Primavera De Filippi.
- ✿ Hybrid life forms - half-machine, half-human, half-software.
- ✿ These smart contracts are like policies.
- ✿ The artwork behaves a bit like a prostitute.
- ✿ It's helping us to think about theta, these might lead us to value as financial capital.
- ✿ The block chain is replacing the web ... we need to get our head around it.
- ✿ The world before block chain.
- ✿ To me a gallery is a place to modify, accept or change conditions around you.
- ✿ The nature of public space is important.
- ✿ It's a machine for the production of art.
- ✿ Future collaboration will be with machines and humans.

- ✿ You have to show that - museums and community.
- ✿ Spaces are valuable things to bring people in.

COVENTRY

'Cut and paste'

Coventry Evening Telegraph Building Friday 20 October 2017

Biennial art has become synonymous with internationalism, neo-liberalism and globalisation. Would it be cool to rock up with a smart phone and shoot a new film in each major city you visit with some locals and then get on the next plane? What makes a new biennial - responsive, embedded and tailored to its locality? Or is this the wrong question? Located within the Coventry Biennial events and exhibitions programme, we invite artists from across the West Midlands (and beyond) to conduct a debate on art, instrumentalism and next-generation biennials. We were assisted in this session by Roney Fraser Munroe and Mike Stubbs, who gave us reality checks on the cult of the biennial and more.

- ✿ Making something that is un-useful is actually useful.
- ✿ I believe in non-conformity.
- ✿ Two days ago I had to go to court for a speeding fine.
- ✿ It's one of those doctors waiting room humbling experiences.
- ✿ I've been at this art thing for 40 years.
- ✿ I was in the Royal Air Force... then I went to London to work with some lunatics.
- ✿ Use what you have ... I learnt this from my Jamaican background.

- ✿ Carnival goers don't consider themselves to be creative or artists.
- ✿ A lack of appreciation for things that are cross-platform.
- ✿ Base f*ck as I call it ... (Facebook).
- ✿ Cyberswarzer was a futuristic exercise in constructing alternative worlds ... they are going to start investigating the corporate world.
- ✿ Cyberswarzer 2 (6 cyberswarzers) issuing ID cards.
- ✿ Dot denoted your sex, non-white or white.
- ✿ Anyone who wanted to stand out of the white lines ... to see how compliant people are.
- ✿ Finally made it to El Papa status ... at the Lux ... the electric cattle prod of enlightenment.
- ✿ Recently been working with musicians ... online radio station with The Orb. Recording idents for internet radio stations.
- ✿ By any media necessary (from Malcolm X).
- ✿ Layers are very important in my work.
- ✿ The Brixton Time Machine, a stretch of Brixton Road that was very rich culturally for years, concentrating on theatre and fashion.
- ✿ Gaps in the business sense in how (artists) negotiate.
- ✿ People they are working with aren't honing them up (in college).
- ✿ Only an artist will be asked to work for nothing...
- ✿ I would rather not work for someone else.
- ✿ The War Against Error.
- ✿ I am about to start a 4th art movement.
- ✿ I don't have anything to do with social media.
- ✿ Kurt Weil (George Clinton and Iggy Pop).
- ✿ The issue for Coventry - looking back and seeing how things can grow ... Coventry's quite poor on that ... It's all about the nostalgia. Hull has embraced that history - the big powers that be in Coventry (that leap of faith isn't quite there).
- ✿ What would need to happen to bridge that gap?

- 🔥 Events week ... to use that possibly in the university next year.
- 🔥 It's easy to be critical.
- 🔥 You didn't see that at grass roots, we didn't have that grass roots i.e. Coventry.
- 🔥 We need some belief ... that they can communicate that vision.
- 🔥 It depends on them engaging with you (councillors).
- 🔥 Within this room we have a room full of people engaging in the arts.
- 🔥 Member of the Labour Party ... a lot of the decisions are made at officer cabinet level meetings.
- 🔥 Diminishing number of spaces.
- 🔥 Politically there are issues, even if you have the will, where things won't happen (because of austerity).
- 🔥 Look at Creative Scotland and compare to here.
- 🔥 I follow the money because that's a part of our job.
- 🔥 There is support in Coventry from the Local Enterprise Authority and cultural strategy.
- 🔥 STEAM Agenda is quite big.
- 🔥 I'm glad I didn't study art.
- 🔥 I believe in creativity ... I cried because nobody ever asked these people about their creativity.
- 🔥 It's easier for some people to have a career.
- 🔥 Pulled by the CEO, their major funders are Coventry City Council, fearing that would come back.
- 🔥 A project about Coventry City fans, an empathy situation with this set of people.
- 🔥 Coventry City football club owned by an international hedge fund in the Cayman Isles.
- 🔥 State aid - European law.
- 🔥 I won't touch it ... (project by artists that was rejected).
- 🔥 You can't ask questions, big puppets and

fireworks, my sense is that Coventry artists are not involved in this.

- 🔥 17 years to get the bid of UK City of Culture.
- 🔥 If you look at Liverpool - European Capital of Culture 2008, it did do big spread and circus spectacles.
- 🔥 It was all a bit of a happy accident ... Liverpool 2008.
- 🔥 Liverpool was the only city in the UK to get Objective 1 funding.
- 🔥 Michael Heseltine created reinvestment back into Northern England. The North can't be ignored ... the Midlands are in the same boat really.
- 🔥 Lots of insider dealing desperate to create more investment for their projects (as funders).
- 🔥 Any useful conversation needs to bury resentment and binary thinking.
- 🔥 Add to making the bid a success.
- 🔥 It's about moving beyond reactionary politics.
- 🔥 Making personal relationships with individuals.
- 🔥 Coventry has an opportunity (a 'low' starting point).
- 🔥 What can you do that's completely new in Coventry?
- 🔥 Artists will normally be at the heart of that - making change.
- 🔥 There is a psyche that is a political issue from industry.
- 🔥 Represents the identity of the Midlands.
- 🔥 Manifesto, statement of intent, treat it as a steering group ... I think when you have space and people that are interested you can't lose.
- 🔥 Coventry is battling this tide of apathy.
- 🔥 A joint problem about expectations.
- 🔥 It got to shouting when I felt that £18,000 was spent on a mural.
- 🔥 A step change between formal arts organisations and commissioners.
- 🔥 We get requests from businesses to buy some

public art. I start by asking them what do you think is art?

- ✿ Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for businesses - percent for artists - section 106 still exists.

- ✿ Context is important for me as an artist i.e. the host arts organisation assists the artist in gaining traction into the locality.

- ✿ What do we want to fight?

- ✿ About having those conversations with people.

- ✿ How long has Milan been a design capital? Since the 14th century.

- ✿ Folkestone Triennial - invested money in to Folkestone (Saga Holidays).

- ✿ Much more about commissioning people (Folkestone).

- ✿ Liverpool got in there and got brand identity of a biennial.

- ✿ How many people can we consult? You can only do your best.

- ✿ The university helped fund the bid ... the university is heavily involved in the bid.

- ✿ Not afraid to come into the room.

- ✿ We have to be more interdisciplinary so we are not just in our art bubble.

- ✿ As a tourist going to biennial elsewhere ... not knowing a city, how do you navigate that city?

- ✿ How do we cross the A46?

- ✿ Coventry has 330,000 population.

- ✿ Metro Mayor across Midlands Engine.

- ✿ West Midlands combined authority.

- ✿ More productive to have two cities working together.

- ✿ Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) bid for creative clusters.

- ✿ It's for local artists ... it's a great recruiting tool.

- ✿ Tourism leap, trying to develop the cultural tourism.

- ✿ A biennial should be for the city and the people.

- ✿ The biennial should be for the people of the city.

NO LIMITS:

A Visual Arts Strategy for the West Midlands

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