

ARTISTS MAKE CHANGE

Discussion Event #5

Making Change through Art Practice and Art Work

Facilitated by Tom Goddard

Discussion Report

Tuesday 17th June 2020

In response to the 5 video case study presentations, we are holding a series of group discussions to explore the themes of the presentations in more detail. Making Change through Art Practice and Art Work was a discussion facilitated by Tom Goddard, an artist and educator often working with communities.

Outset - The aims and intended areas to cover were:

- whether effective change can be made through an art practice
- the contexts and situations for artists seeking to make effective change through practice
- effective strategies and solutions for artists and practices seeking change
- the challenges facing artists working in this way

Thoughts emanating -

In this session, we were also joined in conversation by **Juliet Davis-Dufayard** who provided the Case Study video linked to the discussion session. The session began with attendees introducing themselves and giving a short idea of their individual motivations for attending / connection to the topic. These included:

- Wanting to think about how the current situation (Covid-19 and Black Lives Matter) have changed whole contexts in a very short space of time
- How we as artists and creatives convey and support communities towards change, to see how through art making, working with the communities, we can play an important role to accompany them into this new normal.
- Engagement in non-art communities, finding communalities
- What's classed as artistic practice and community development?
- Thinking about the built environment and finding joint visions

The facilitator Tom Goddard had identified 3 key topic areas emerging from Juliet Davis-Dufayard's presentation, which were offered to bring into breakout discussions in 3 breakout rooms. Not all of this discussion was recorded, so what follows are the key areas brought back into the main discussion with the group.

TOPIC ONE - ARTIST

THE LINE BETWEEN ARTIST AND COMMUNITY MEMBER

ATTEMPTING TO REMOVE HIERARCHY

COMMUNITY FIRST, ART PRACTICE SECOND

NO COMPENSATION OR CARE versus EFFORT / TIME PUT IN

Tom's Observations & Questions

- Juliet was living & working in the same community – as artists can be facilitators, there is an argument that artists can only act on behalf of a community they're part of as otherwise it's an act of oppression.
- **To make real change, does an artist have to be an integral member of the community they're working with?**
- Juliet talks about removing hierarchy, sharing power between herself and the community at all stages of the process from idea to aesthetic choices to implementation. Juliet talks about people moving in and out of circles, to the edges and back all through the project, I liked thinking about it that way. We aim to equitably compensate and recognise community members as co-creators, from a position of care; but on top of that, if you remove all hierarchy, who does the admin?
- **Is it possible to deliver a project, which includes necessary coordination and admin, without a hierarchical structure? Are artists the gatekeepers to creative practice?**

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- **Is it possible to deliver a project, which includes necessary coordination and admin, without a hierarchical structure? Are artists the gatekeepers to creative practice?**
- Juliet touched upon the council, putting the community first, our practice second. So with the Let's Grow project it's co-created with equal partners, I would call that civic practice - sharing out every part. The admin then remained with Juliet, suggesting there's something about long-term projects that becomes about the skill of organisation. Any collaborative project comes out of many visions and working in a community led way can mean putting your own practice to one side.
- **In order to work with the community, do artists have to let go of some of their artistic intent or part of their practice? Nowadays Artists are seen as natural community organisers - is this simply because of the way funding is allocated or do artists have an inherent ability to communicate?**
- Lastly, compensation or no - versus effort and time put in. In a community project all people's time and energy is precious and you should provide real value in exchange. There is the reflection in the film, at certain times Juliet wasn't having enough support or time away. She made the example of the project on top of her day job, needing time away.
- **How do you share the load with those in the community, without funding, fees or training. Are artists required to make social change in a community?**

Feedback from Breakout Room

- Looking at how multifunctional community centres or youth groups might incubate projects and share knowledge.
- How can artists not make things so difficult?
- Looked at how people are engaged with projects if the organisation has pre-existing community relations: giving introductions, bridging gaps.
- Education needed for the funders and organisations as to what can be realistically achieved, an understanding for time needed to develop relationships and for research.
- Evaluation - how reports are passed on to others, and how benefit can be gained across the board from the evaluations
- Non-hierarchical structures, how do they give equal power to all: committees, artist-led groups that might do this?
- Some of the complications of these structures, volunteers, how people can benefit or be paid?
- Who's claiming capital? Social or otherwise? Because there's often a major discrepancy between who is "useful", benefits not evenly distributed.

TOPIC TWO - COMMUNITY

USING COMMUNITIES FOR ARTISTIC GAIN

CREATING GENUINE ACCESS

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN COMMUNICATING AND CONNECTING

Tom's Observations & Questions:

- Juliet reflects on instrumentalising community: how can we ensure full disclosure and ensure everyone benefits? Communities' needs can be in conflict with the artistic vision; a sense of aesthetics or response of the community can be a conflict. Artists serving an effectively socially engaged work, Juliet is based in the community. It must be discussion based, evolving constantly through conversation, which is draining but the community's input is always there.
- **What are the moral issues with instrumentalising the community as a core part of the art work? How does this change if the artwork is fundamentally beneficial to the community? How does this change if the artist is paid for the work or not?**
- Also, what is a real benefit, how do we create real benefit in a community especially when these projects often happen when there are real ingrained issues? I have to ask myself, is art providing solutions or is it a solace from the problems?
- **In a community where there is some kind of social or economic deprivation which you could argue is heightened during Covid 19 what is the purpose of projects that don't directly positively effect basic human needs?**

- Juliet makes great points about supporting community involvement, we can all reflect on alternative methods of access to enable an equal opportunity access for all. Also, the difference between communicating and connecting - face-to-face connection is interaction door to door in the film.
- **What are the key ways that we can ensure that access is genuinely for all? Is this possible? Is a face to face connection with members of the community critical to genuine engagement?**
- Short-termism versus the long term impact, and what about exit strategies? How does this work if the artist remains a community member and goes to a different project? I think all projects have a lifespan, especially if funded. But how do we tackle this moving on, the legacy? It's more than legacy, how do we support community change?
- **Community projects typically have a time period - what is the artists duty of care to the community when the artist can often be transient?**
- Juliet touched upon gallery involvement in community projects, I'm interested in how this changes the project from civic practice to outreach and what are the nuances in terms of value for artists and community? The gallery involvement has a different relationship with who gives you money, different objectives. I've been looking at a network with local social enterprises to come up with a potential answer, bringing together existing private & public enterprises. There may not be artistic spaces within that yet.
- **How does an artist ensure a positive legacy and ongoing life for the continuous process of community benefit? *communities as evolving ecologies themselves**

Feedback from Breakout Room

- Thinking about value - What's the value for the community of different activities ?
- What's the difference between an embedded and an outreach project of a larger entity? Example of projects in Wales - Artes Mundi, and the difference between projects happening outside Cardiff vs. those happening within Cardiff which are more gallery based.
- How do we lobby or communicate the value of the different roles in the projects?
- How do we advocate for artists being paid?
- If artists had their basic income covered in another way we might make different types of projects and work in different types of ways - avoiding being instrumentalised and the communities we work with wouldn't be instrumentalised either (art -washing) - thinking about who funds projects.
- Did the money come first or the project?
- Is the project being shoehorned into a budget?
- The balance between outreach and that delicate area of funding creates discomfort.
- From a community's point of view, if a lot of the time is given by people who volunteer and are active in the community, how would they benefit from having their basic economic needs met?
- What changes would we see in the types and forms of projects?
- Everyone within a project - funder, stakeholder, artist, community, community member - has to be invested with a real interest to see best practices rise up
- There has to be a tolerance for failure, but that isn't often possible, projects get replicated.
- To achieve social change, which is what we all want we have to **invest** in building a community through art-making; meaning that in terms of art and culture being important.

TOPIC THREE - EXTERNAL STUFF

GALLERY INVOLVEMENT IN COMMUNITY PROJECTS

WORKING WITH INSTITUTIONS FOR FUNDING

EXPECTATION AND POLITICAL USE OF PROJECT BY EXTERNAL PARTIES

SHORT TERM-ISM VS LEGACY

Tom's Observations & Questions:

- Thinking about the expectation and use of artistic projects by external parties, and their specific expectations. Juliet references an award they got and how it was slightly difficult for the community. And the BBC had completely different expectations, very little genuine engagement from the community. That sort of expectation and political use of the media is difficult even if you get everything right!

- **How does gallery and institutional involvement change the practices within the project for better or worse? Would the community led context have meant that the output would have been the same?**
- Is working with funders, such as institutions and councils, and their policies a necessary evil? In an age of austerity and cuts to frontline services how is it possible to walk on the right side of the line between complicity with cuts versus supporting progress in the community?
- **How do you protect the community from being used as media opportunities for political gain? Is it the artist's responsibility to protect the community from this?**
- When working with galleries, councils or other funding partners a project is typically for a fixed duration - how can genuine engagement with the community be possible on this basis and what does it mean for the legacy of the project and the communities continued well being?

Feedback from Breakout Room

- The use of art (with a small a) in a project for those external people (communities and local stakeholders - non-artists): if you emphasise Art with a big A it can switch them off
- Within a gallery or institution, the importance of allowing an artist to be an artist - slower processes around programming, how can that be facilitated?
- Necessary evils and how important the idea of autonomy for an artist is
- An artist's idea starting as a fantastic football and then by the end it's a small ping pong ball
- Externals edit the artist's idea
- Artist led organisations can really play a role here, the understanding of the artist's role is really useful and artist-led organisations can take the external strain away so that can be a fruitful supportive relationship - borne from implicit understanding of the challenges and processes
- That really relies on those artist-led groups being really supported, and how are they being supported? You can end up doing absolutely everything, caring for artists and artwork and audience - it's a big mass of everything.
- There's a need for supportive entities who understand community and social change, as in how can we build bridges with less staff, less time, less money around?
- There needs to be a real re-evaluation of what an artist does. Think of an artist in residency - a lot of community artists need this desperately after years in their communities. Why isn't the community where you are providing that support?

Broader Group Discussion

- Artists expected to mop up the bits where funding has been removed because of austerity, artists becoming sponges that absorb and have to fill in all the gaps.
- Artists' residencies are never just about doing your own work. It's always being pulled in a million directions. I've come away not happy with my work as I've tried to please too many people. Where is the no-strings residency?
- Some artists / arts orgs - responding to Black Lives Matter issue - now going into a panicked frenzy that they hadn't had enough people of colour in their programmes - and looking to redress that issue within the next 2 weeks!
 - This really highlights the need for long-term consideration, care that's so multi-faceted, the sense of where that care is and how well you can serve a community rather than a sticking plaster by having commissioned work by certain artists. That feeling of panic and need to quickly resolve something, I really see that in people working in organisations right now.
- Failure isn't written into the budget - how do we account for it and make space for it in our projects?
- Value. How is this measured? - Who tells us we are successful as artists? Is it only because we may be successful to get funding? Goes back to care, recognition and other factors.

Closing thoughts:

Let's think about shifting the balance of where the value lies - the idea of a code of ethics and a care-centred approach for everyone involved; a sense of safety, of equity, genuine exchange and sharing power at all stages of the process.

Let's keep encouraging artists and everyone to fail upwards - everyone brings something else from their own life experience as that's how we learn. You can teach the same things but people interpret them based on their own life experience as well as the future and the past.

We need to develop ways of working that are long-term - that's what we're desperate for. The sense of pressure, the idea of constantly programming, this sticking-plaster approach is laughable - a despicable way of working. Whereas by responding from a long-term vision - making people actual partners in what we're doing - then the long-term objectives and approach won't go far wrong.