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1) 01.09.2015 on paying artists, open calls and changes for the worse, call to action

You may have noticed this week that I have done something I rarely do publically – I have expressed frustration about the pressure the art sector is under and the impact this has on artists and commissioning.

I must make it clear that I am not criticising the arts organisations for operating the way they do, but I am asking questions about them. Someone has to, sometimes. It's a bit like a studio crit during an MA Fine Art course – it's not about judging or attacking, it's about intelligent comment and questioning and rigour. And it is meant to be constructive.

My rigour slipped a little this week – I made direct reference to two art groups during my questioning, which may have been misinterpreted as being intended to undermine them. I apologise if anyone thought that, it wasn't the intention at all.

A discussion took place on Facebook around pay for artists as a result. Following that I responded to an article by Jack Hutchinson on a-n about the charges to artists for Open Calls.

I've been working in the arts for over 25 years and have been swept along by the many waves and breakers that have happened in the visual art sector. Some have been lovely rides – the 1990's when artist led groups began to 'do-it-for-themselves' and the Arts Council supported and enabled that swell. New flagship galleries were being planned and artist led groups also thrived – using empty buildings in cities as part of regeneration, Councils supporting that by waiving business rates for the owners and rents for artists.

Despite the fact that massive numbers of students were then being squeezed into underfunded, under-resourced art colleges, grants cut and fees bumped up, artists were beginning to thrive. They weren't all Brit-pack-rich by any means, but they were making things happen and had the power and infrastructure to do so for other artists too.

Here in the South West ALIAS offered invaluable advice to artist led groups (I was lucky enough to benefit when they were able to provide a small grant, as opposed to charge. I was also an advisor.) ALIAS at that point was an ACE funded professional development scheme.

As artist-led groups became increasingly professional in their management and ability to run micro-businesses, ACE also recognised their potential and began to help them to buy buildings and studios.

I'll slip in a question here – does anyone have any idea how many artists subsequently became subsumed by running projects, managing staff, cafes and buildings?

I'd love to see the stats on that. I could make a list as long as my arm, and indeed was one of them. I have no regrets, it was exciting, useful and functional at the time. Local Authorities were supportive, Universities and of course ACE too.

Art was respected in society and it felt good.

What happened? A lot of changes occurred that took it from that to this. We sit amongst the flotsam and jetsam of those waves, with unsuccessful funding and commission applications tangled around our ankles. There's an oil slick of despondency while everyone struggles to stay afloat.

Charities lost huge amounts of money in the financial crashes, resulting in some changing their application processes in favour of organisations. Public spending was slashed so local authorities had no choice than to drop art off their to-do list. Universities struggle under constant cuts. ACE has been decimated, and given a much bigger workload too. The property market boom means there is no reasonably priced housing, and few artists could even get on the ownership ladder, even if they wanted to.

Paid stewards have lost their work in galleries and been replaced by volunteers. Interns abound, those whose parents can support them are able to get their foot on the ladder, and those who can't work in call centres, cafes and bars.

The big fish are still ok, though even they will be feeling the pain more than ever before. It's the smaller ones that fight on and make things happen, mostly by being tenacious and determined, or working for nothing. Or peanuts. Or grazing the sea-floor.....grass-roots setups like Skipchen arise, and I'm so glad they do. They draw attention to food waste and food shortage, to poverty and zero-hour contracts.

Artist-led groups are beginning to increase in number again, but without business rate subsidy, rent-free premises and with far fewer options of achieving an income, it's much harder now. They are trying hard and making excellent small marks in the art ecology. Other artists are applying frantically for commissions. Often highly competitive for very low fees, they are resilience in action. Galleries are running on shoe-string staff.

I am frustrated as to how we get out of this dark place. Campaigns like Paying Artists are great. But the recommended rates are not being carried through to the artists – and it is not legislation. Just like the minimum wage, which is largely ignored. Zero-hour contracts, internships (bad ones, there are some good ones too), Open Calls that ask for money with not having the capacity to pay a production fee for making work, or a hanging fee. They are all, quite simply, not paying the minimum wage.

This is not respectful of art or artists. And we should not let it happen.

No other professional has to live like this. No cheese maker has to pay to provide cheese to a shop. No solicitor has to pay to apply for a job (and to boot the job doesn't have a salary attached.) How many builders will pay a property developer to let them go and work on their site for below minimum wage?

If it is not ok elsewhere, why is it in the arts?

Sign up to Paying Artists and the Artists Union, let's make things change. That way I will stop being a grumpy old woman. I hope.

2) 04.08.2013 partnership V collaboration in the arts - how different/similar are they?

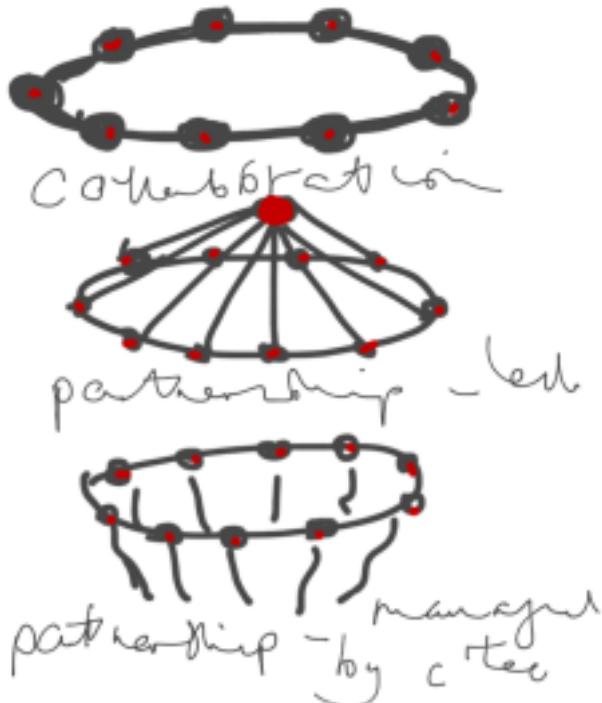
Yesterday I was privileged to share the day with a roomful of arts professionals from the South West UK region to discuss leadership in the visual arts, supported by VASW.

The day was fast-moving and stimulating, covering a huge amount of ground in a short time, yet allowing time for deep discussion and exploration. I'm not going to report on what happened in the room because it is a safe space for people to engage. But I will share part of my personal enquiry about what partnership and collaboration might look like.

For me, the conversation about the difference between partnership working and collaboration was intriguing. They are essentially very similar in intention but different by nature.

I

did this diagram to help me:



(translation for my scribbly writing is collaboration; partnership - led & partnership - by managed by committee)

In collaboration all are equal but no-one leads, it's probably like a cooperative. My drawing is pretty stable, but it could equally be very wobbly, having no one person representing the collective voice and keeping things tight. However, it has the potential to balance.

Partnership - led means we're all in this together, but for clarity and maintenance of a shared vision, one person leads on the partnership. This could result either in a strong balance, or create tension. Important that the person leading has been

appointed by the partners but is also gifted autonomy to make informed decisions to enable forward movement.

Partnership - managed by committee has the ethos of the collaboration, but is weakened by its constant efforts to allow a voice to everyone involved, with no lead. So loose threads are left to dangle, with no-one there to gather them up and hold the collaboration together, as in the 2nd model. In these situations it is often that 'he/she who speaks the loudest' makes the biggest impact on what happens.

Online definitions given are:

partnership:

1. The state of being a partner or partners.
2. An association of two or more people as partners.

collaboration:

1. The action of working with someone to produce or create something.
2. Something produced or created in this way.

So the first relates to 'being' whereas the second with 'produce/create' This aligns with the feeling in the room that arts managers refer to partnership, whilst artists are more inclined towards the term collaboration.

However, partners can collaborate, can't they?

The drawing represents my-thoughts-in-action and is open to change. Any suggestions?

3) 14.08.15 Why do we keep so much 'stuff' - and how can The Story of Objects help?

Reading this article by Joshua Becker- [21 Surprising Statistics That Reveal How Much Stuff We Actually Own](#) reminded me of the early thinking about my project and the drivers. And this mass of 'stuff' is one of them.

There simply has to be a better way of managing these things, reducing the burden of them, without losing the emotional attachment we have for them. Easy to always refer to William Morris and his famous statement: "Have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful."

My question to William, were he still alive, would have to be: "Well Bill, what about all those things your parents left behind when they died, and their parents? Ugly things that you can't bear to part with, trinkets a lover once gave you, or a theatre ticket from a special performance? And all those lovely things you made – did you bequeath them to your friends and family, or did you leave instructions to drop them off at a charity shop after your death. If a friend gave you something you found distasteful and useless, did you tell them to take it away?"

Mr Morris will of course have made and owned beautiful things, but many people own cheap stuff from supermarkets, pound shops or from car boot sales. They can't afford to commission a local carpenter to make them a table. Useful things, but certainly not beautiful in his terms. Cheap and plentiful, created with built-in obsolescence.

But that's where the problem now lies – so plentiful we keep more than is useful. And if we discard them, they are set loose into the world with no provenance, picked up by others and used again. We simply don't have the space to keep all this stuff – and it becomes orphaned objects – aesthetics makes no difference at all, there's no discrimination needed – just chuck it out. Or pay to store it, as Becker points out in his article.

BUT what if we were to upload these orphaned objects to a website, put up some photos, even videos (like the 30 second ones you can see [here](#))? Add a story, detail of provenance, where we got it, why we kept it, and why we decided to let it go.

Would that make life richer? Might people enjoy that connection with the previous holder? Could it help people to track down things, or find out more about them from others?

Sharing things is a delight – who doesn't love to share? Yet many of these things we care about are hidden away, no one knows about them. Their story dies when we die.

Of course there are practical barriers, many people dislike technology, don't use computers. Some love to meet socially to share their stories (that's part of the offer of Story of Object – to convene these meetups – presently for research purposes). Others are lonely and dislike talking about themselves – but find it cosy to talk about their own stories through the object they hold in their hand.

So what you see with Story of Objects is a culmination of many thoughts and feelings. It may make you feel slightly vulnerable to share like this, but it may also be

a fantastic experience, and eventually leave you some more space in your home without paying for storage.

It will be an option.

Take a look at this film – it's an invitation to have a deep meaningful conversation that is started through an object - it's about sharing something that matters

<https://youtu.be/Dg6i0vAydoU>

4) 29.04.2014 review of *Mycophilia* by Louise Short at Ceredigion Museum in Aberystwyth

Please share this with others, it's such a wonderful show.

Mycophilia is the first of two shows being presented in the Ceredigion Museum temporary gallery space by Short&Forward and runs from April 17 to May 31st 2014. Alice Forward's exhibition *Swarm Society* will run from June 12th till 2nd August and her works resonate well with those of Louise. Both make work that explores our relationship with the natural world and expresses their passion for protecting and conserving it for future generations. They share a love of film, mushrooms, bees and life.

Louise Short's exhibition, *Mycophilia*, exhibits exquisite casts of fungi and spore prints as filmic objects. In a temporary space next to the Ceredigion Museum in Aberystwyth, she has presented a constellation of 3D snapshots of moments in time and place, captured and recorded in plaster, bronze, paper, paint and spore-dust on paper. The title of the installation, *Mycophilia*, means the love of mushrooms, likewise filmophilia means a love of films. Spore-dust is an evocative phrase that whispers the story of their process in your ear. On entering the gallery to experience *Mycophilia* viewers are transported into another world. The prints on paper are trapped underneath glasses, lest they should escape like spiders or wasps, and the science-fiction presence of a constellation of plaster casts suspended in a deep blue universe spans the whole back wall. Ian Banks meets Richard Mabey meets Thoreaux. This installation is both 2D and 3D – filmic and sculptural. It hints at mass fields of growth and microscopic detail. Each trace of fungi reveals its own intricacy and uniqueness - together they are a cosmos.

A love of the process of film and a deep understanding of nature is present in all of Louise's artworks, but not always in an obvious, cinematic way. *Mothshadowmovie* (1999, 2000) turned an everyday office overhead projector into a screening device in a woodland – attracting and amplifying the ghostly visits of fluttering moths and slimy snails. For *Something Else*, her one person show at Arnolfini, Bristol in 1997, Louise cast the tender insides of daffodil trumpets, fixing the voids in plaster. In 2001, in the basement of what is now the Exchange Gallery in Penzance, she filmed the walls of the redundant telephone exchange then re-projected the 8mm footage back onto their surface. The projectors shuddered and rattled, returning life to the abandoned architecture. *Feeling Faint* created a gentle echo on the walls, the images quivered softly like Narcissus's reflection on water. In Louise's work solid things are made ephemeral and transient moments solid. Casting is like a 3D camera, the imprint of the brief moment that the fungus manifests itself above ground as solid matter is caught and made tangible.

The spore-dust deposits fine footprints of the mushrooms reproductive potential, they multiply generously but few will survive the process. Their lives are brief, like stars they appear unexpectedly and disappear suddenly, as if by magic. They are indeed other-worldly without consumption - you don't need to eat them to be enchanted and drawn in by their hallucinatory nature. In the scale of things humans are similarly short-lived. We make art, we write, we create, we procreate, and every moment is to be noted, considered and experienced in our short lifetime. This exhibition of fungi prompts us to be mindful of this and the artwork is the outcome of a very thoughtful and considered process of walking, meandering and being in the moment.

During Louise's regular forays through the beautiful Welsh landscape, where she lives and works, she was able to immerse herself in her thoughts of the ephemeral, returning with a record of her journey, on that day, of that place. *I must let my senses wander as my thought, my eyes see without looking...Be not preoccupied with looking. Go not to the object; let it come to you...What I need is not to look at all, but a true sauntering of the eye.* (Thoreau Journal 4:351) Solitude, silence, no signage, wandering aimlessly, like the rhizome of mycelia that appear as fairy-circles below the surface of meadow grass, Louise reflected upon her roots and relationships, walking random routes through the landscape, meandering, thinking and casting her gaze as she foraged, capturing her fragile trophies to keep.

Fungi is corporeal in nature, soft like flesh, but cold to the touch. Love, tenderness, fragility, vulnerability, the human condition are all here in this exhibition.



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2014

5) 29.05.15 collaboration, collectives, umbrella art projects - please remember your audiences!

The recession and the need for resilience in the arts has resulted in a huge number of art projects, many in cities, that present festival or events that represent collectives of smaller arts organisations. Cardiff Contemporary, Bristol Weekender, SVA SITE Festival to name but a few.

It makes sense for the organisations – it's brilliant to go for audience sharing, resource sharing and marketing. It makes the money go further and has more impact. In terms of cultural tourism it is a winner. But is it?

I've always believed in sharing resources – after all, the first project I managed, The Dialogue Project involved many partners, arts and non-arts. It amplified what the project did and benefitted hugely from the support of the larger organisations. But in those days (2003) it was clear the project itself was by Independent Artists Network and supported by the others. And the audience knew that – it was clear, concise and the opening times in the guide was fixed between certain dates, certain times, a window of time – not spanning over a long period.

In terms of scale, there was enough to keep visitors busy for a full day – and on the days it was open those visitors could see all of it. It was geographically and physically possible to do so.

In short, the audiences were considered and their visits facilitated and supported by our printed maps and guides.

Twelve years later what has changed?

Certainly there is less money to go around. The key arts organisations can no longer afford to support the up-and-coming artist-led events the way they did. They can no longer pay artists to be invigilators either. It's a real shame, but it is the way it is. We used lots of empty buildings in Bristol – at the time the enlightened Bristol City Council allowed us to do so for free, and relieved the owners of their business rates while we did so. No longer does that happen.

Thanks to constant diminishing of resources, more organisations are joining up with others, but sadly this means the audience has been somewhat abandoned, leaving them wandering aimlessly around the streets looking confused. Increasingly these multiple-organisation events/projects/festivals are presenting under a huge umbrella, and the audiences get stabbed in the eye by the spokes. They simply can't see where they are going, interpret the complex guides, understand how to find these multiple-location gems.

The reasons are many-fold, but for me, navigating these events is key to the visitor experience.

As someone who enjoys navigating new cities with a map in my hand - Liverpool for the Biennale, exploring Kassel for Documenta, or hotfooting around Venice, something is going badly wrong these days. And it is often the maps and the information I'm given.

Some of these collective presentations are so damn complicated you need a degree in cartography to make any sense of them. They cover large lengths of time and wide distances of space – with some projects opening in one month, and others the next. They all open at different times, they often open for only some days a week. Not too

much of a problem if you live locally – but what about people who come to see them from further afield? As producers and events organisers, we encourage new audiences and people from beyond our area – we have to, to justify getting grants. But we increasingly make it very hard for them to see the works – because they are hard to find if you are new to a city. It's simple.

Often what is on a website cannot translate easily to paper. You can't just click on a map, or use your sat nav on your phone. Big county-wide shows like Art South and ExLab were impossible to see in one day – the travel distances between each venue being so far that even in a Porsche you'd find it impossible to get around in a day! So I have a plea – PLEASE can we (and I am guilty of this too) remember that we enjoy OUR audiences, and we ARE audiences ourselves.

Here are a few guidelines that might make life easier for audiences:

Audiences matter – be kind to them. Don't frustrate them, make them tear their hair out.

Stick to your programme you publicised – you set it, so it's not that difficult.

Don't tell me when I arrive to see something advertised to open at 4 that the artists are late "because they are coming from London". I'm not impressed – I'm p***d off.

Align opening days and times. Make sure the distance between sites is manageable. Walkable.

If you have listings and include a map – put the symbols you mark the map with onto the listings too.

Provide postcodes for sat nav users

Check the facts in your print, and then check them again

Don't presume every audience members knows your city – they don't

IF PEOPLE ARE GOING TO COME TO SEE YOUR WORK - MAKE GETTING THERE EASY FOR THEM - LET THEM WORK AT THE ART, NOT AT THE MAP!

6) 23.01.2015 Marrakech, art, humour and feeling delicate about feminism

Earlier in the week at the Maison de la Photographie, I saw wonderful historical images of the Berbers, and bought postcards of some photos of women wearing burkhas, because I have always been fascinated by the powerful impact they have, particularly in feminist debate.

Before reading further, please look at Shirin Neshat ' Rebellious Silence' 1994 Her self portrait of the artist, part of Women of Allah series. An iconic image of the artist holding a gun, with her face covered in calligraphic writings of Farsi texts.

'As the artist, I took on the role of performer, posing for the photographs. These photographs became iconic portraits of wilfully armed Muslim women. Yet every image, every women's submissive gaze, suggests a far more complex and paradoxical reality behind the surface.'

But it has now. And the Neshat image returns to my mind, as I sit in a city that is welcoming, beautiful and just slightly edgy for me (as a white european woman).

This week, in Marrakech, I saw a recent work by Hassan Hajjaj. Hajjaj is a Moroccan artist, born in 1961, Hajjaj has spent many years living and working in London. Hajjaj offers a contemporary take on similar issues, with a playfulness that dances around the edges of the tensions that arise around the burkha. When the film "Naabz" (2011) was initially programmed to be shown at the Marrakech Museum of Photography, the Charlie Hebdo tragic shooting had not yet occurred.

Hajjaj's work both amused and unnerved me. That it was shot in Paris cannot free me from relating the two events - the film and the city. In her film, she rides around dressed in a burhka of sorts, but it is comprised of spotty handkerchiefs topped with lady gaga star sunglasses. The film was made 11 days before the French banned the wearing of the burhka. She wears spotty clothes, possibly a nod of reference to the Japanese artist Yayoi Kasuma (1929)

Her performance shows her fly posting images of women in burhkas, racing around in her crazy costume, Juxtaposing her posters with background images of the Eiffel Tower, the cities fallic symbol not to be messed with. The night of the recent shooting the tower lights were switched off to show respect for the cartoonists who had been shot dead in the Hebdo offices.

This darkness plays off against the humour. Like Pipolotti Rist's work, Hajjaj speaks for women of all nationalities. Feminism is often used as a critique against the burhka, but when Muslim women speak out in defense of the burhka, where does that argument reside? What right do western women have to make decisions on behalf of other cultures? What right do fundamentalist any-religion people have to make decisions about other people's lives?

Freedom of speech is one thing, murder in the name of religion is murder.

Art speaks of these things. Art can be political but is not to be confused with politics. Religious fervour can have ethical codes, but no ethical code results in murder. Because murder is not ethical. Or morally just.

When the world is rocked by a murder and then uses it as a tool to provoke more murder, something is seriously wrong. Use words, use art, use dialogue. Drop the gun. Violence is never the solution. Humour is a buffer zone, respect it.



7) 21.09.15 BlackRock at Lydney Park, Gloucestershire - London comes to Lydney

Good morning Monday! I have had a gloriously eventful and wonderful weekend, when finally the two things I love – the Forest of Dean and contemporary art – collided headlong. And people too – lots of them – old and new friends.

Of course I live in the forest and deal with contemporary art every day of my life, but rarely do the two collide with such a burst! I shall explain.

I moved to the Forest in 2006, when I was working for the Forest of Dean Sculpture Trust. I learnt a huge amount there about commissioning work in woodlands, about audiences navigating outdoor spaces, partnership working, fundraising, blue light meetings – the lot. I even started a PhD about it, but gave it up. I had to, because it was spoiling my love of writing, and art, and giving me too many sleepless nights. I am more interested in how we *experience* artworks in rural places than whether those works are deemed good or bad in academic circles. I also gave up the job – 5 years in one place is enough, it was time to move on.

Most of my work since then has been done outside, coast paths and beaches, barns and lighthouses...the list goes on. If you want the detail, read my [CV](#). That's all in the past, I'm more interested in the weekend.

Working in the arts for so long I have got to know some amazing people over the years, so imagine how lovely it was when I bumped into them this weekend unexpectedly, in the beautiful landscape of Lydney Park.

All I knew about Lydney Park before Saturday was that the Bathurst Lido belonged to the estate, and I swim there daily in the summer. While I cruised up the pool, I occasionally glimpsed a big house on the hill, but presumed it was private (which it is.)

This weekend it was open, to host a show of works by 5 artists, commissioned and managed by Matts Gallery in London. I heard about this residency scheme – BlackRock – a few weeks ago. So of course I went along – a little baffled as to what its status was – was it public? Was in invite only? Who funded it? Why now? What are the future plans? How will they manage it as an event?

I know - I shouldn't work at weekends. But it's hard to take the visual arts producer hat off sometimes.

So I went along on Saturday and loved it. Really loved it. Here are some very brief notes on the works.

David Cheeseman's works – *Standing Still, falling short – Plan(c)k* - had humour and locale in them. They played on history and the now. The River Severn. The eternal viewpoint across the landscape. *Neither here nor there* also by Cheeseman, comprised of an OHP projection onto a blackboard, which was also chalked up to appear as a window looking out to a huge moon. A rather ambiguous bench structure, with its top filled with neat rows of thick, black and white felts, stood at an angle, with its top a bit squiffy....like a coffin lid....

Bronwen Buckeridge's fantastic audio work - *What would happen if I wasn't here?* - up in the woods did the same – raising questions about land ownership, the rural, about life in the forest in times gone by. Visitors tromped about through the brambles with headphones on, listening to the directional audio that genuinely provided a form of time-travel for the listener. Mesmerizing. I enjoyed that so much I even went up the ladder to the hunter's seat the next day – those who know me will understand my fears around that experience. I kept thinking about Simon Schama's book - *Landscape and Memory*. There's a whole chapter in the about the Forest of Dean and how rebellious it has always been. I hope it stays that way.

Rebecca Birch's two part work was called *How the miner looks – a view point and a tunnel*. It connected deeply with how miners look and how we look too. One part was up high in the woods, that took visitors on a slippery journey along tracks of iron-ore reddened earth. What they viewed were the scowles in this ancient landscape, where Freeminers have worked below the surface for centuries. Her performance in nearby Aylburton, presented in a Potato Barn, which contained black conical heaps of rapeseed (a bit like poppy seeds) reminded us of the coal spoil in the forest, remnants of the industrial past. She performed using projectors, drawings, temporary screens of paper and card, taking the audience into her head and down into the mines below. The barn was a prefect location.

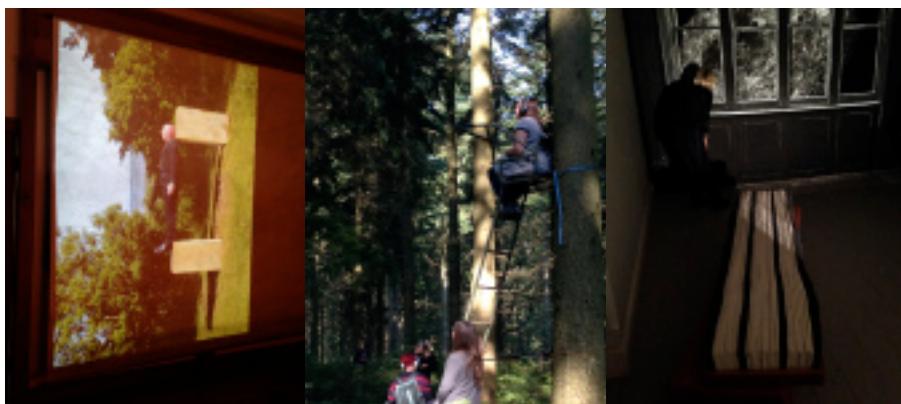
Roy Voss had a work in the rhododendron garden – the word HIDE created from timber struts. Stood against dense foliage, a great place for kids to hide inside. In the spring when the flowers bloom it will be rotated and rearranged to declare RIOT. Nice. My biggest delight was Susan Hitler's work *Channels*. Installed at Cross Barn in Aylburton, a huge wall made of various size and types of TV monitors, set up so perfectly a spider couldn't crawl between them, on the screens mysterious crackles and tales of near death experiences.

The location should not be ignored here. The works all relate to the place and the history. The house and estate are fascinating, there's even a Roman Temple in the grounds. And the Bathurst museum collection is like a little snippet of the Pitt Rivers!

So that's the work – then there were the people, old friends and new. Lovely. No names needed here.

Add to that my first experience of sleeping on a canal boat all cosy and comfortable (my only other experience resulted in a panic attack due to claustrophobia), and relishing the peacefulness of the scene. All was perfect. And strangely the boat was moored on the other side of the Severn – I could just make out the Lydney Park estate from the canal. Beautiful.

I have much, much, more to say, questions to ask, answers to find, but no time to do that now. I look forward to hearing more about BlackRock – welcome to the forest and thanks to Matts Gallery and Lydney Park Estate for doing it.



more images on website.....

8) 19.08.2015 a privilege to speak, to listen and share - Stories of Objects supporting memory recall

Running Story of Objects sessions is always deeply fascinating and rewarding for all involved - this one was very special:

*Dear Carolyn,
thank you for the 'Story of Objects' workshop that you delivered for the 'mindSCAPE' group on 18/08/15. 'mindSCAPE' is a Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Beauty, Big Lottery funded project for people with dementia and their carers.
The session was fascinating, the group brought in a range of objects and photos of things that were important to them. It was wonderful to hear the group talk so openly about their objects, which in turn led them to discuss their lives, their memories, thoughts and feelings. Notably, it was wonderful that participants with dementia talked so freely about their objects - clearly a project of this nature has significant benefits in terms of reminiscence. The group were keen to ask questions about each others objects, which led to interesting, and at times, moving discussion.
The group agreed that we all learned a great deal about each other in the process. It would be great to see more work of this nature for people who have dementia, as it enables the capture of memories which may be on the brink of being lost.
Thanks Carolyn*

AND

It was a really interesting session yesterday. From my perspective it was interesting particularly to see how the use of the countryside and landscapes conjured up so much passion, from interesting natural items to simply enjoying the outdoors through dog walking. It was interesting to see also how most peoples treasured items related to being outdoors and exploring, whether it be locally or further afield.

*Many thanks, Nick Critchley, Development Officer, Wye Valley AONB
Thank you Artspace Cinderford for inviting me, it was a privilege to be witness to such wonderful life-stories in the lovely Forest of Dean*

9) 09.04.15 "A most eccentric desk" Song for an artwork! Steve Hill performs for launch of Miniature Museums

When we launched the Miniature Museum of Museums by Tara Downs & Bart Sabel at the Waterways Museum last month, we had a very special treat. The artists had engaged in deep research to inform the elements of the artwork, which is presented in the form of a modified and adapted desk. We're discussing the process and collaborations on Sunday 19th April Flow Contemporary Arts is hosting a brunch at SVA in John Street, Stroud, as part of the SITE Festival.

Tickets: £5 breakfast included, booking essential

Email: office@sva.org.uk. Tel: 01453 751440

To celebrate the contribution and involvement of many of the volunteers and staff, and to add to the interpretation of the collections, we were very grateful to host two performances.

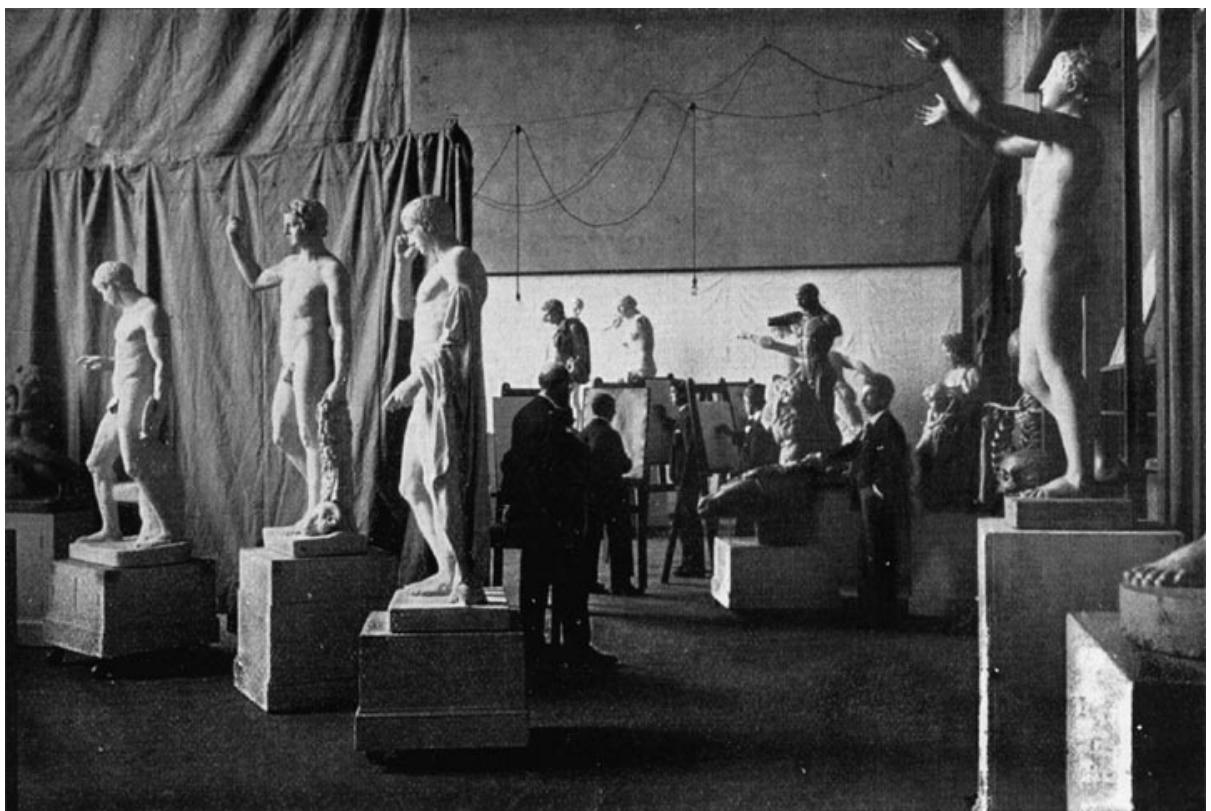
The first was the wonderful Pate Choir from Cheltenham, who sang Song of the Shipbuilders - words by John Greenleaf Whittier & music by Gustav Holst. Holst is most well-known for The Planets, but he was also very interested in folk music and was an active socialist. Sadly our video wasn't great of the performance as the light was hard to manage, but you can download the words of the Song of the Shipbuilders and we hope to upload a sound file soon.

The second performer was Steve Hill. Steve is a singer songwriter and works at the Museum in the Park on reception. Asking Steve to write something about the artwork resulted in a song called A Most Eccentric Desk. You can watch it here and enjoy the playful response Steve had to the Miniature Museum of Museums. You can download the words here.

Working with so many inspirational volunteers and staff at all three museums has been what makes this project so special. The commitment and passion people have for the places they give their time to adds a unique dimension to the work of all museums. We are very grateful and inspired by those people, thank you for making the research process for the artists such a delight.

Thanks to Steve, PATE choir and Julian for whipping out his mobile phone and filming

10) 01.09.2013 updated: Roger Hiorns, Hepworth Gallery, ***** young men, machines, alchemy



some words have been replaced by ****'s to avoid people being disappointed by my website not offering what some people expect to find!

Charlotte Higgins [article](#) about the new work by Roger Hiorns, that opened yesterday at the Hepworth Gallery is entitled 'Artist Roger Hiorns fills Wakefield warehouse with ***** young men'.

How misleading and sensationalist that description now seems, having had the most wonderful, evocative encounter with the work. The warehouse is certainly not filled with ***** young men. It is far from full of anything, the careful spacing between the objects within the space providing a strange theatrical stage that has a seemingly divine light streaming in, creating halos around the classical tableau of life-class poses. Hardly a sound in the room, an homage to traditional art education that is apparently no longer affordable in our art colleges.

Consider the images we have seen of formal art classes (image above) I chose this image because, as you see, the models were not even real bodies, but classical examples of the idealised human form. They are presented on plinths, often stone or wood, a juxtaposition of culture (the stonecarving) and natural materials. With that in mind, consider what Hiorns is showing us.

The large industrial room has an array of man made, industrial objects placed around it, fairly equally spaced and arranged. There is a symmetry

The light streaming through the windows provides a gravitas, a wondrous lightshow that falls upon the objects and the performers

The objects are variable, some aircraft engine parts, a stainleess steel kitchen worktop (or is it from a morgue? A surgical worktable?)

Regimental rows of white plastic buckets with lids, half filled with an unknown substance, partially wrapped in polythene, stacked in an ordered manner. Resting on wooden pallets (plinth)

A typical metal street bench, on which is a small circle of 'stuff' - grey powder, dust, ash

A coffee table (plinth) with live BBC news footage showing on it's flat-screen surface.

A naked young man posed on the coffee table, relaxed, still, calm, quiet, contemplative

Another man sits on an engine part, also still, posed, comfortable with this metal hulk of engineering (I did notice a tiny piece of foam rubber which must have helped to create this illusion)

Naked flesh against flatscreen TV, and against weighty industry, the ghosts of industry, redundant artefacts.

Compare with the life class of 1900. What part of Hiorns work represents culture? What is nature? What is worthy of being in a museum? Why are there no art students in here drawing? Why, as someone who attended art college, do I 'know how to behave' as I view the work? As the audience, I look wth respect, I would not dream of touching these passive, vulnerable men as they gaze into nowhere, or bow their heads in submission to the visitors gaze. There is a strange sadness, the redundancy of the machine parts, the passing of the industrial age. I wonder how the work might be if the models were young women. How might that feel? How powerful is the visitor gaze?

Then there is the stuff. I begin to see the stuff on some of the objects and feel driven to ask the steward what it is. She explains it is from the flame. Some of it is ceremoniously swept away and replaced, and lit. A tender, gentle flame of chemical source flickers into existence close to one of the models sitting on an engine part. It is absolutely magical. The only moving living thing in this calm. It is alchemical - it reminds us that stuff is life and life is stuff, of the moment, illumination. It dances in the sunlight. I loved it.

Occasionally the models silently move from one place to another. No eye contact, just a sense of purpose to carry out their training.

At the end of the performance they quietly pick up their folded clothes from the windowsill and begin to dress. We leave, it would seem inappropriate to watch them dress, dressing is a private act. Life models have screens or dressing rooms, the act of dressing transforms the models from objects to subjects, at which point our voyeurism is acknowledged. We become aware of how we have visually consumed something which we are not usually allowed access to, and it is unsettling.

I have always wanted to see Seizure by Hiorns (commissioned by Artangel). On my way homewards today I'm going to see it at Yorkshire Sculpture Park. Exciting! Especially after seeing this offer from his Youth series.

I've always enjoyed alchemy. Sadly, like life drawing and dark-room photography, artists today are begin sensually deprived of these things. It's important we never forget that when people and stuff comes together, magic can happen.

