

Social Art Summit Lab Proposal.

Lead Artist: Anna Francis

Invited Guest: Rebecca Davies and Dan

(waiting for confirmation from SAN if other suggestions are acceptable.)

Title of Session: Representing the Change: Rules of Engagement. (Working title as struggling with that bit.)

Duration of Session: 2 hours

Group Size: Max 25



Image: Portland Inn Project, 2018 (Glen Stoker)

Proposed Outline of Lab: requested themes include: Place-Keeping lab, with themes around regeneration / gentrification / housing / embedded community building / arts in situ

Artists working in contexts of change, with communities and other stakeholders can often be seen to straddle various roles and contexts within an art project.

It can be challenging to manage (sometimes conflicting) agendas, needs and objectives within a project and to be able to maintain integrity.

As major cuts to public budgets across the UK affecting everything from roads, to health, to homelessness increase, artists are increasingly finding their work in places of change, and work with people, requires ever greater flexibility, resourcefulness and a whole host of other skills when working with communities dealing with the fall out of all of these cuts.

Couple this with cuts to the arts, making funding increasingly difficult to come by, and the need to deliver and demonstrate impact means there is pressure on artists and their work to ensure projects are successful. Notions of success, for artists working in precarious contexts can be challenging to define, and in this lab, we will aim to unpick the rhetoric and image of successful community based arts programming, by aiming to explore and reveal the way an arts project can be presented as successful, and how problematic and one dimensional the presentation can become, due to inbuilt need in most projects to demonstrate success.

Drawing on a practice rooted in regeneration contexts, and places of change – Anna Francis will aim to reveal the sometimes precarious aspects of managing complex projects, in order to create a space for truthful, supported exchange around a need for greater transparency in the ways that artists are working, in order to demand greater support for the important work undertaken.

Outline of Lab:

10 minutes: **Introductions** – who is here and what are they hoping to gain from the session?

Anna Francis Practice concerns 10 minutes: presentation on background of working in relation to housing. Anna Francis presents work in Stoke-on-Trent since 2006, leading up to Estate Agency project and The Portland Inn Project. Anna will frame some questions raised by The Estate Agency project around ‘artwashing’ and where artists working in places of change can and should expect support to come from.

The Portland Inn Project (At this point introducing Rebecca Davies – artist collaborator in The Portland Inn Project.)

20 Minute presentation in two halves: 10 minutes presenting the Portland Inn Project summer programme: Raising The Roof’s successes. Showing the positive experiences, feedback from Participants and exciting outcome (Architect’s Plans for the Pub Building.)

Then 10 minutes presenting the alternative presentation: which shows the problems encountered, challenging meetings with the community prior to the programme, images of the phone box which has been the centre of anti-social behaviour, drug dealing and has become part of the projects remit, to see the phone box cleaned and advocate for it to be removed. This 10 minutes will talk about the challenges of working in this context, and talk about the way with projects like this, this additional work, which spills into remit of councils, service providers and health care professionals at times, is largely unseen in the project documentation, aiming to create a space for discussing what happens when this side of the work is hidden, and the value of making it visible.

Dan Russell – 10 minutes Presenting his work with the Social Housing Arts and The Newbridge Project Dan will raise a series of questions: ‘why work in communities?’ or ‘why fund art instead of other stuff?’, ‘is all art complicit in gentrification?’, ‘how much do you invite communities ‘behind the curtain’ and expose the mechanism of projects?’.

Controlling the Controllables: (15-20 minutes) Next, the group will create a list of factors which impacted on their performance within a social project. On a large sheet of paper with the word ME in the middle – the factors will be organised (via conversation) closest to ME where they are factors which the artist can control, and further away when they are external factors.

Then we will discuss how the various factors could be brought more under the artists control (if at all) in order to ensure the artist feels more supported, and the project is able to thrive. So, for example – considering the Portland Inn Project – I could discuss that Location had a big impact on the project, but that due to the nature of the neighbourhood, there was no other choice for where it could take place – so that is quite far from ME. FUNDING had a major impact on the project – and due to hearing quite late re funding decisions – the 4 weeks of delivery felt quite frantic. I could have done something about that by putting in the arts council application sooner etc. giving me more time to involve partners etc.

Series of **questions** for the group – recorded by scribe for each group: **20 minutes total**, 5 minutes on each:

1. In your experience, what have been the biggest challenges for you when working in places of change/with people? And how did you navigate these?
2. What are the guiding principles for you, in working in social contexts, where are the absolute lines in the sand?
3. What issues, relating to the representation of projects have you faced and how do you feel about showing both the good and the more challenging parts of projects?
4. What additional support/ what would be most helpful to you, in order to continue to work in these contexts? What strategies do you employ, to enable the work to happen?



Image: Modes of Practice Workshop 2011 (Glen Stoker)

Now, based on the discussions which have taken place throughout the session: consider a set of guidance advice tips or rules of engagement which, given the experience in the room can help everyone here, as well as others working in social contexts in the future.

10 minutes: Lets come up with **5 rules** (in each group) for how artists working in places of change can ensure good practice, and support each other in the coming years.

Share these.

10 minutes: And then **vote** on which will go forward for our list (top 10). Lets read out the strategies and then finally:

10 minutes: Discuss how to disseminate this, and best format. Agree. If this involves all of us sharing via our networks – lets agree to share email addresses across the group to ensure we all have access to the list.

Evaluation: what will you do differently after the session today? (on one post it)

What worked?

What needed more work?

Materials/Resources needed:

Flip Chart paper, post its, biros and flip chart markers

Projector and extension lead.

Sticky dots for voting.

Masking Tape.

Room: The room would be great if possible to first set chairs out in presentation format (all facing projection, but then with the ability to spread out a little bit.

Support from Volunteers: It would be brilliant, alongside myself and support from Rebecca Davies to have 3 volunteers to help with scribing the discussion section. (So that for each group of 5 there is one scribe). If this is not possible, I can ask one member of each group to be in charge of that.

Anna and Rebecca Notes for 'Representing the Change':

NOTES :

Reasons to be cheerful:

- 1. Negative stigma;** In Portland Street the area has had to overcome and battle with negative press and judgement for so long that we want to rewrite that story with local residents. And if we want to call out the shit we are in danger for being a part of the problem
- 2. Morale;** It's been important to keep positive and the celebratory aspects of the project are important locally for hope and to keep up morale (of residents and us).
- 3. Conscious of audience;** Will we seem unprofessional to say, funders, if we call out the challenges we constantly face? And the lack of support we feel? ie Big Lottery
- 4. Ethics;** How on earth do you document, share and expose some challenges, particularly drug use and dealing - when doing so can be unethical?
- 5. Risk and Failure;** Learning through doing - part and parcel of the practice is to negotiate the risks and challenges - something we've got used to doing and just getting on with it.

List of challenges we face on Portland Street:

Lack of input from local residents, some people aren't interested, and others won't get involved after years of feeling let down.

People we are working with have a lack of trust in the council, each other, local services

Children in the area can have already experienced some challenging situations (but are amazing in the face of that, but we can sometimes feel ill equipped – the image shows a simple sharing session our architect did as an ice breaker, where people were asked to say how they ended up on Portland st...)

That same day, in the middle of a very productive session where we were really getting somewhere in exploring what the community might need from a building – suddenly a man appeared and was lurching everywhere (he was high) and demanding a drink etc. we were getting him a drink but he began shouting and swearing about being abused as a child, we had a lot of children with us, so I had to ask him to move up the street away from the group, at which point he became violent, kicking walls and bins and yelling...the session was stopped...

Other issues we face:

Cuts to public services leading to a lack of support in all areas...

Lack of support from council, who started the regeneration scheme in the area, to regenerate 31 houses, but did nothing about community cohesions (and some exploitation of the project in relation to their gaps)

Cuts to police services (so although we have a good and necessary relationship with the police, they can't always respond very quickly)

Increasing drug taking and dealing in the area and homelessness and the multitude of issues this brings with it – as an example, part of our remit has been to go to training around understanding new synthetic drugs like mamba and monkey dust, and how to administer an opiate overdose antidote.

Shit in the phonebox/negligence and a lack of responsibility taking from companies and partners

Final Celebration Day as a case study: for these challenges

11.00 arrive

11.10 men high

11.20 man collapses

11.21 call ambulance and police (the other man took everything from collapsed man's pockets)

11.30 cpr'ing a man back to life

11.40 ambulance arrives

11.45 set up for the day

IN ADDITION :

main contact at council didn't come

phonebox

other end of green filling up with drug users as we cleared up

That is one day of the project, but there are other things which are invisible: all of the meetings we go to, the hours and hours and hours of admin, application writing, email writing, campaigning, talking to people....all of that is invisible work. And we are wondering why – why is it that we only show the good bits?

Why now?

Why we think it's now important to share the challenges.

1. Increasing number of people working in this way;

Means it's important to be truthful and clear about the two sides to the story that we as artists have to negotiate. Make the work more visible in order to benefit the audience and those who want to work in this way.

2. Impact; Because of enormous cuts to the arts/public services;

It's becoming increasingly difficult to get funding for any art. If we fail to demonstrate the true scope and impact then we make it easy to undervalue what the impact is. We need to make time to demonstrate the impact, otherwise it makes it too easy for this work to be reduced to discussion about numbers and audience figures – and this just isn't about that. A project's impact isn't demonstrated by how many people came, it's more nuanced and challenging. Better to reveal those challenges than hide them. Important to be vocal about the gaps we're filling. Our job title is expanding, and the support to do the job is diminishing – we are headed for a crisis if this continues.

3. Responsibility to represent;

(knowing our position); Do we feel that we truthfully have the right to represent this community? Never feel like you're speaking for these people - they have a voice. But we represent this community when we go to council meetings/conferences/get invited to silly dinners, and so we need to make sure we speak up about what is really going on. It feels tough to talk about the shit in the phonebox, because for us, these are not the things the work is about, but it is what we are dealing with, so we need to make it more visible.