

Create Strategy launch

Deirdre Figueiredo MBE is Director of Craftspace, a limited company and arts charity based in Birmingham and has expertise in visual arts, contemporary craft and design. She also specialises in practice and strategy around public engagement, participation, creative production, inclusion and diversity. In a voluntary capacity she sits on the board of several arts organisations across England. Deirdre is the Chair of Create's board.

I'd like to thank Ailbhe, the team and the board for their hard work in evolving this strategy with its guiding principles and framework devised to support the ecology, resources and relationships that will develop discourse policy and next practice in the coming five years.

What we understand by collaborative arts practice is that it "involves artists and communities working together, often over extended periods of time, to make art. It harnesses the experiences and skills of each person taking part to give meaning and creative expression to what's important in their lives. By facilitating wider participation, collaborative art expands and diversifies public engagement with the arts, enriching its contribution to society."

Collaborative Arts instinctively feed into modern concepts of 'the commons' - knowledge commons, digital commons, cultural commons and neighbourhood commons – all of which activate the power of social cooperation to get things done. "The act of commoning draws on a network of relationships made under the expectation that we will each take care of one another and with a shared understanding that some things belong to all of us—which is the essence of the commons itself."

It challenges capitalist models of production and consumption. "The practice of commoning demonstrates a shift in thinking from an ethic of 'you're on your own' to 'we're in this together.' Pitted against the Commons, however, are the forces of Enclosure, which attempt to appropriate, own and sell resources that were once accessible not through the power of money but through the rights and responsibilities gained by being a member of a community. Commoning is also a way to tap into the hidden chamber within our imaginations, which harbours vivid images of different ways to live."

The strategy has five goals with the intention that the outcomes serve to ensure the ongoing sustainability of this important sector of the arts. Some of the key focal points are re-purposed resource library and a new living archive of collaborative arts both providing a physical and virtual hub for cross sectoral learning and exchange. Joint initiatives such as the inaugural Triennial for Social and Collaborative Practice will be seminal and showcase Ireland's artists and practice through an international stage and lens. The development of an Evaluative Framework and Register for Collaborative Arts will measure the impact and value of artistic and cultural enquiry and actions – ensuring that the social, human and other forms of capital that accrue from our collective work are acknowledged and communicated to those who might invest and partner and can influence policy.

We are living and working in divisive times of great political uncertainty and global challenges, not least the crisis of climate change, the widening gap between rich and poor, the human cost of mass displacement and migration. This is set against a context of the rise of narcissistic leadership and individualisation. Whilst in the digital realm artificial intelligence is both a threat and an opportunity. A world economic forum study estimated that AI will replace 52% of current work. In this scenario the artist's 'job' will always endure because it is unpredictable and because of its insistence on social justice, radical intervention, disruption, protest, dissidence and most of all human to human connection. Through collaborative arts we are prototyping community futures, circular economies, occupying, animating and activating the civic space through critical voices and modes of doing.

Artistic enquiry and actions also offer alternative models of leadership that are more distributed than centralised, more co-operative than singular, more civic than corporate. Create will play a leading role in all of this. A vital part of Create's strategy is an intersectional approach which will not only diversify the field of practice but also work with artists and communities to re-frame ideas around inclusive cultural and other forms of citizenship.

I'll finish with a quote written in the strategy document that encapsulates the ethos of our forward travel – it's from Hina Khan a recent AIC cultural diversity residency participant:

“If you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go further go together”

On that note, I invite you all gathered and also those not in the room today to join Create on its mission and journey to make constructive change happen with renewed intention, purpose, optimism and vigour.

Deirdre Figueiredo, MBE

Chair of Create, 2019