

Learning Lab

STORIES OF COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Inspiration untethered from action loses all value.

Rustin, 2023

Participating Artists:

Tobi Balogun
John Conway
Cathy Coughlan
Jijo Sebastian-Pallaty
Silvina Sisterna
Steph Saidha
Tatiana dos Santos

Presenters and Facilitators:

Awate Abdalla
Abdullah AlKafri
Áine Crowley
Ismail Einashe
Kate O'Shea

Learning Lab Director:

Áine O'Brien

SEA: Creative Challenges

Socially engaged art (SEA) is not for the faint-hearted. It demands a bewildering mix of skills, learned on location with communities of place. These include deep listening, walking alongside and 'hanging out', as Clifford Geertz puts it, together with the ability to initiate civic trust aligned with different forms of social activism rather than (narrowly) artistic practice. The socially engaged artist is often a cultural catalyst, code switcher, listener, mediator, editor, problem solver, strategic thinker and an advocate for the re-imagining and activation of social spaces. Perhaps the most salient skill of the socially engaged artist is to be able to 'leave one's ego in a box outside the door'. Not easy, but arguably essential?

Leaders of social transformation...see the long game and are committed to pivoting to adapt and readapt strategies in the face of complexity and changing circumstances.

Transformational Change Leadership, 2020

You are invited to participate in a Learning Lab on Stories of Collaborative Leadership and Social Change because of the richness of your socially engaged practice. Practices which lay the ground for different forms of movement leadership and the political re-imagining of communities, networks and infrastructures.

We invite you to learn and unlearn together, through the values of conviviality and mutual care. To explore what leadership might look like in a committed collaborative context.

How might the following questions relate to and align with your practice?

How and where does the concept of 'change' operate in socially engaged practice?

How is socially engaged practice (or social practice) a creative amalgamation of art and activism, with an emphasis on process and collective action rather than the generation of a singular art object or the profile of the solo artist?

What does leadership mean for the socially engaged artist, whose practice is shaped by collaboration with others in local communities?

What motivates social engagement and the collaborative impulse as opposed to solo production with its focus on the creation of an 'art' object?

How do artists narrate their 'presence' (identities) in the very doing of socially engaged practice?

What role and purpose does curation have in the public staging of socially engaged practice?

If socially engaged practice is primarily collaborative, why is leadership so often associated with individuals?

What might we mean by collaborative, systems-change leadership and movement building?

What role does ethics play in collaborative processes that advocate for systems-change?

THERE ARE OTHER STORIES TO BE TOLD...

Print by Dara Greenwald, Josh MacPhee, and Olivia Robinson from Spectres of Liberty's Open City Workshop

1-1 Conversations

The Learning Lab will progress via a series of 1-1 conversations. The aim is to reflect on your practice (using some of the above questions) with the aim of telling a story about how and why you do what you do.

We'll bring these 1-1 conversations into a one-day gathering on 10th May 2024.

Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.

James Baldwin, 1962

Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche, 2009

Learning Lab Trajectory:

The Learning Lab will move across the following axis:

Democracy...Truth...Authenticity...Voice...Story...Civic Action...Transformation...Community...

April 2024

'Conversations in and with practice'

1-1 with Áine O'Brien (online or in-person)

10 May 2024

10:00 am

Gathering at iD8 Studio, Digital Hub, Dublin

10:30am -11:30am

'Private Lives and Public Stories: remembered selves/communities in an age of disinformation'

Online conversation with Ismail Einashe

12:00pm-1:00pm

'Re-Imagining/Re-Building Infrastructures in an age of displacement'

Online presentation with Abdullah AlKafri

1:30pm - 3:30pm

'The Archival Process - building social spaces, networks of participation, equity and solidarity'

Practical workshop led by Awate Abdala & Kate O'Shea.

4:00pm - 6:00 pm

Group conversation

Output: Working Paper #1

PARTICIPATING ARTISTS/FACILITATOR BIOS:



Awate Abdalla is a critically acclaimed rapper, producer, screenwriter and archivist focusing on stories at the intersection of race, class and surrealism - with a dose of humour. A former Activist in Residence at UCL's Sarah Parker Remond Centre in 2021, Artist in Residence at the Tate Archives and British Library in 2020 and 2019, Musician in Residence for the PRS Foundation and British Council working in Brazil in 2018, and Resident Artist at The Roundhouse in 2016 - Awate has produced a wide range of commissioned multimedia works mixing music, film, theatre and visual art. He has frequently worked with Counterpoints Arts on projects such as Refugee Week, PopChange, Platforma, and Hip Hop Pedagogy: Reclaim the Archive. Awate composed the music for the award winning play, QUIET REBELS in 2022, and his short film I WAS TOLD THERE'S FREEDOM HERE premiered at the BFI Southbank and the Barbican in 2021. Awate was part of the writers' room for series like RAGDOLL (S2) and CUTZ. He's been working with THE AMERICANS producer, Joshua Brand, on a crime series titled INVISIBLE, and is writing a semi-autobiographical feature supported by the BFI Development Fund called THE SHED.



Cathy Coughlan is a multidisciplinary artist working across visual arts, film and dance-theatre contexts to create hybrid works for gallery and theatre spaces, as well as devising site specific and community responsive projects Nationwide. Cathy is currently Head of Project Potential at Project Arts Centre. Going beyond access and engagement, Project Potential is a space for complexity and nuance, where there is an intention to work in an authentically inclusive way, across all areas of the organisation. Supported by The Arts Council Cathy trained as a professional dancer in the UK (1994-97) and continued her arts training with The National College of Art and Design, Fine Art Dep. (2005). Her work has been supported by Arts Council Ireland, Dublin City Council, South Dublin Co.Co., Rua Red Arts Centre, Laois Co. Co., Kildare Co.Co., The Dunamais Arts Centre, Dance Ireland, Dublin Fringe Festival and Shawbrook. As an artist working in a collaboration with communities she has delivered projects and performances in association with Kildare County Council, Visual Gallery Carlow, Tipperary Dance Platform, Tallaght Community Arts, RADE, Common Ground, Create, Focus Ireland, the Fatima Regeneration Project, Bealtaine Festival, Dunamais Arts Centre, Dublin City Council, Dance Ireland and Coisceim Dance Theatre – Broadreach.



Abdullah Alkafri is an award-winning playwright and theatre director. He has also collaborated with arts organisations including LIFT (UK), the Royal Court Theatre (UK), IEVP (Norway) and Lark (USA). He also works as a trainer, strategic planner, fundraiser and designer for arts intervention initiatives, working with Culture Resource (Al Mawred Al Thaqafy) and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung among many others in Lebanon, Syria, Tunisia, Yemen and elsewhere. He is a member of the Advisory Board of the Arab Council for Social Sciences, the Artistic Committee of Sundance Institute's MENA Theater Lab and the board of the 10th Summit on Arts and Culture. In 2014, Abdullah Alkafri, a founding member of Ettijahat – Independent Culture, was chosen to succeed Ms Rana Yazji as Executive Director of the non-governmental organisation. Ettijahat is dedicated to supporting Syrians artists and cultural practitioners and their peers across the Arab region and Europe, providing capacity-building and educational opportunities to artists, cultural practitioners and academics, as well as financial and legal support. Abdullah also teaches MA Theatre at l'Université Saint-Joseph, Beirut, where he was awarded a Phd degree in the Performing Arts in 2022.



John Conway is one of Ireland's foremost socially engaged visual artists. He works in complex and often traumatized community and health contexts to explore the role of art and the artist there. His work occurs across art forms including sculpture, installation, moving image, audio, theatre, virtual reality, publication, choreography of performance and curation. His prolific working process is characterized by acute listening, sensitivity to context, experimentation with artistic forms, and a robust interrogation of artistic processes across collaborative contextual work and formalised gallery output. The scale, scope and model of responsive enquiry is met with a focus on high-end production quality in all aspects of his work. John's work often involves expertise of arts and non-arts personnel and occurs over a number of years involving a high degree of project management and stake-holder relations. As a leading artist in the field of socially engaged and arts and health practice, John contributes to these ecologies as a mentor of numerous artists around the country.



Tobi Balogun is a Multidisciplinary Artist, working across Dance, Theatre, Voice and Design. His work focuses on cultural sustainability and the exploration of Black masculinity. In 2020 he received a Create Bursary to develop phase one of BLACK CANVAS - an R&D project examining the experiences of Black-Irish creatives and communities. Work emerging from this included curatorial residencies in Dance Ireland (MoveMEANT 2022/23), LIBERTY VIBES - an event supported by DCC Local Live Performance, and NATIVES as part of Culture Night (2022). His work is funded by the Arts Council and has been supported through residencies at Dance Ireland (2020-2024), Photo Ireland (2023), Project Arts Centre (2023) and Centre Culturel Irlandais (Paris 2024). In 2023 he worked with Theatre Company Brokentalkers, as a performer in 'Manifest' (Project Arts Centre) and performed in John Scott's 'Dancer from the Dance Festival' 2022/23. As a choreographer and movement director he worked with Theatre Maker Louise White, Poet Felispeaks and with music artists Jafaris, Burna Boy and Ed Sheeran among others. He has developed youth projects in association with artists Cathy Coughlan, Maria Nilsson Waller and with organisations such as South Dublin County Council, Tallaght Community Arts, Dublin City Council, CoisCeim Dance Theatre Broadreach, Project Arts Centre and Dance Ireland.



Áine Crowley is Programme Manager in Arts and Engagement, Create. In this role, Áine advances Create's work to support artists and communities of interest and/or place to realise high-quality collaborative arts practice, through ongoing professional development support, project opportunities and the development of cross-sectoral alliances and partnerships. She coordinates the Artist in the Community Scheme, providing project and proposal advice and support, information and guidance to applicants. Before joining Create, Áine led community arts research for Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council and Voluntary Arts Ireland on their Exit 15 project, which is situated in Ballyogan and responding to the artistic aspirations of local people. She has also worked with the Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown Arts Office as Youth Arts Development Worker and with Mayfield Arts in Cork, where she collaborated with diverse local communities. Áine has worked on ambitious collaborative projects including *Hungry Tea*, a durational site-specific performance with artist Mark Storor, and *Creative Connections*, a women's intercultural group. She holds a BA Fine Art in Printmaking from Limerick School of Art and Design.



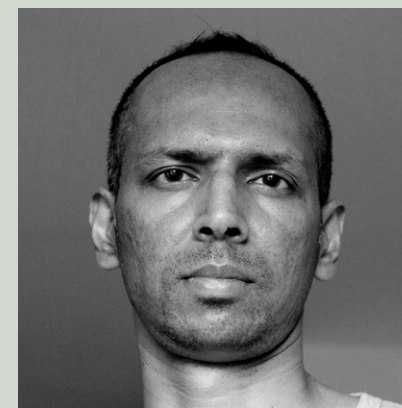
Ismail Einashe is an award-winning journalist and writer. He has written for The Guardian, BBC News, The Sunday Times, Foreign Policy, ArtReview, Frieze and The Nation, among many others. He is the author of the book *Strangers* by Tate Publishing, which explores migration through the lens of art. He co-edited the volume *Lost in Media: Migrant Perspectives and the Public Sphere*, a collection of essays on the representations of migrants and refugees in the European media. He is a member of *Lost in Europe*, a cross-border journalism project that investigates the disappearance of child migrants in Europe. In 2021, he won the inaugural Investigative Journalism for Europe (IJ4EU) Impact Award as part of the Lost in Europe team. In 2019, he won a Migration Media Award, and in 2020, he was shortlisted for the European Press Prize. In 2019, he won the Alicia Patterson Foundation Fellowship, America's oldest journalism fellowship, for his year-long project examining China's role in Africa. He is also an Ochberg Fellow at the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma at Columbia University and a member of the editorial board of Tate Etc., the magazine of the Tate Galleries.



Áine O'Brien is Curator of Learning and Research and Co-Founder of Counterpoints Arts, London. Áine directs the Learning Lab, a cross-sector platform supporting cooperative (un)learning through socially engaged art (SEA), which influences the pedagogy of the Summer School on Collaborative Practice and Social Change. Collaborative learning initiatives include *Who are We?* at Tate Exchange (2017-2019); *Mutual Affinities 2022* (commissioned by Creative Scotland); *Art, Migration and the Production of Radical Democratic Citizenship* (co-edited with Agnes Czajka, Rowman International – Frontiers of the Political Series, 2022); and the *Collaborative Incubator Toolkit*, comprising conversations/commissions with investigative journalists and socially engaged artists and activists. Áine is a founding member of the Beyond the Now Collective (BtN) – comprising partners working in locations across Europe and SWANA. BtN aims to open new creative, cultural and political affinities for a post-pandemic world; and to amplify the necessity for and experience of solidarity in a time of crisis. Projects in development include, Learning Lab on Socially Engaged Art and Collaborative Leadership (with Create); a forthcoming chapter exploring the intersections of art, activism and community imaginaries will be published in *Socially Engaged Art Across Ireland: Contested Narratives, Places and Futures* (Cork University Press, 2024)



Kate O' Shea works across printmaking, archiving, large-scale installation, performance, and publishing. In 2023, Kate co-produced with *The Just City Residency* *How Much IS Enough* (published by Half Letter Press, Chicago, Common Ground Dublin 8 and Create). In 2022, Kate co-founded the transdisciplinary collective, *Broken Fields*, bringing together experience, knowledge, and practice from the fields of socially engaged art, architecture, community work, social movement archiving, activism, research, and writing. A *Broken Field's* proposal for a new community space at the Irish Museum of Modern Art was exhibited in 2023. From 2021-2023 Kate has collaborated on Creative Places Tuam projects including *The One Stop Shop Print Club* and *The West's Awake*. In 2022 Kate published *Gravity Express # 1* with Ciaran Smyth (Vagabond Reviews) and presented *S.E.A. Heart//Break* with Siobhán Kavanagh at Cork Midsummer Festival. In 2021 she was awarded the Artist in the Community Scheme Bursary Award in Collaborative Arts & Community Development; and co-organised Networks of Solidarity with Enya Moore. Kate is co-founder with Victoria Brunetta of independent publishing house *Durty Books* with a forthcoming publication titled *The Artist-led Archive – Sustainable Activism and the Embrace of Flux* with Megs Morley. In 2015, she co-founded The People's Kitchen and is a member of Red Wheelbarrow Productions



Jijo Sebastian is a collaborative filmmaker with more than fifteen years of experience in participatory, collaborative and transcultural filmmaking in community-based contexts. He was awarded an 'Artist in the Community Award' from Create – the national development agency for collaborative arts in 2015 and an Arts Council of Ireland's 'Next Generation Bursary Award' in 2016, in addition to an 'Arts Participation Bursary' in 2020. He has co-written, directed and edited ten short films and one tele-film collaborating with individuals, groups and families from the Keralite Indian community and others in Ireland. Currently, he is in the process of making a feature length collaborative film working with a transcultural community in Dublin, commissioned by Hugh Lane Gallery and Create, the national agency for collaborative arts



Silvina Sisterna is a socially engaged visual artist based in Dublin. Originally from Argentina, her artistic practice is rooted in the collaborative experience of working with women from Latin America and the use of the photographic medium as a means of female empowerment and reflection of their identities. She holds a Master's degree in Fine Art (TU Dublin) and is a 2023 recipient of the AIC Project Realization Award by the Arts Council managed by Create. Last year, she was the recipient of the 2023 Create and FSAS Residency Award, and she was also selected to participate in the Summer School on Collaborative Practice and Social Change. Earlier this year, Silvina joined the Latin American Solidarity Centre as a Management Committee Member.



Steph Saidha is a visual artist based between Limerick and Dublin who is dedicated to exploring connections between space, identity, childhood, tradition and communities. Through process-led collaborations her practice is committed to creating ways of coming together that encourage empowerment, consciousness and critical reflection. Her work utilises interdisciplinary methods of engagement taken from socially engaged practice, hospitality and critical pedagogies. While this work can take many forms, it often tends towards photography, drawing and text-based installations.



Tatiana dos Santos is a multidisciplinary artist, journalist and cultural mediator. With over 25 years of experience in dance and performance, her work is deeply influenced by themes of migration, belonging, and decolonisation. Her projects include Hot Brown Honey's *Hive City Legacy*, which received the Judges' Choice Award at the 2022 Dublin Fringe Festival. She wrote and performed her debut monologue *Threads* at the Solo Sirens Festival 2023, exploring themes of care and vulnerability and celebrating the anonymous characters of everyday solidarity. Tatiana also collaborates with Catherine Young Dance on *The Welcoming Project*, an ongoing initiative aimed at promoting integration and social cohesion. The project brings experiences and plural narratives together through Irish, Afro-Brazilian, Ukrainian, and Palestinian (Dabke) dance styles. Tatiana's methodology as a socially engaged artist is explored in 'Everybody is a Dancing Body: Using Dance, Talking Circles, and Empathy to Transcend Cultural and Emotional Barriers' (Field Notes, 2023).