

A Time and a Place Symposium

Talking about Artists' Residencies

New Brewery Arts, Cirencester

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Event Summary

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Introduction

The symposium *A time and a place – talking about artists' residencies* took place at New Brewery Arts, Cirencester. It was chaired by Grace Davies of Visual Arts South West (VASW), hosted and supported by Hannah Brady, Exhibition Manager at New Brewery Arts (NBA) and funded by Arts Council England.

The event was initiated and organised by Janice Botterill, first-time curator and recipient of New Brewery Arts' inaugural *OpenCurate* programme. It was planned as an opportunity for discussion and debate about artists' residencies alongside the exhibition 'A time and a place' which ran in the gallery from 17th January to 21st March 2015. More details and information about participating artists and residency hosts can be found at www.atimeandaplace-exhibition.blogspot.co.uk.

The event included talks by the exhibiting artists and their residency hosts alongside informal discussion and debate about the purpose, benefits and challenges of residencies.

Artists' Talks at the Symposium

To begin, the audience heard from Nancy J Cleman and Tara Harland Viney speaking about their intense, week-long residency at the Marine Theatre, Lyme Regis where they were able to develop their collaborative work outside their own respective studios and workspaces. The residency culminated in a performance in the theatre, challenging and stimulating their respective practices around performance, film and photography.

Julie Smith (lead visual artist), Peter Tyas, Head of Art & Archives at Wiltshire Council and Sue Kester (participating artist) described the *Semantic Archive* project which emerged from an initial workshop hosted at Wiltshire & Swindon History Centre in Chippenham. An artists' book and online publication were created (http://issuu.com/juliesmithissuu.com/docs/semantic_archive_digital_book) and the project continued to develop, culminating in an exhibition at The Young Gallery, Salisbury. This residency began with a selection of artefacts made by archivists at the centre and involved sixteen artists responding to that selection according to their individual practice and interests.

Sarah Parker, Property Manager at Kelmscott Manor gave an insight into residency from an organisational point of view – the practicalities and timescales involved in organising a residency including funding and logistics as well as issues involving the physical location of the artist within the property itself and the process of selecting one artist from over 150 applications. The benefits of Sasha Ward's residency for Kelmscott included bringing a new and different perspective to the house and its history. Sasha's residency involved running workshops and participatory activities giving visitors and volunteers another insight into the house and into Sasha's

practice as a glass artist. A film and blog have enabled the residency to be shared online to a wider audience still (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3XIU197sb88>)

Jill Carter, Artist and Roger Watson, Curator, Fox Talbot Museum, Lacock Abbey reflected on their experiences as artist and curator during Jill's week long residency at Lacock Abbey during the summer of 2014 – the culmination of *Curious Narratives*, a year-long artist-initiated residency project across a number of venues in Wiltshire. Jill's residency practice focuses on narrative, storytelling and experience, "not so much about the object but what the object does to you" and as such shifts the experience of a place both for those who work there, visitors and volunteers with the artist as catalyst for self-reflection.

Finally, Ann-Margreth Bohl spoke of how she consolidated her exploration of material and space in her residencies at the Garden at the Museum in the Park, Stroud and The Sheds at Stanton-St-Bernard to develop and install *Lichtspielhaus* within the gallery space. Her focus on material, in this case, beeswax has been a key moment for her, particularly with a planned residency at New Brewery Arts in the summer of 2015, she spoke about this new aspect of her practice and process.

Discussion: What is a Residency?

A whole-group discussion revealed a variety of approaches and models of residency. Residencies were described as:

- An 'off-grid' retreat, time and space for an artist to explore their practice and process without distraction
- A place between artist studio and gallery, providing an environment and time for experimentation and the development of an artist's work and practice
- A place of collaboration between artists and other professionals involved in a particular place including writers, museum curators, archivists, scientists, volunteers and visitors
- An opportunity to access expertise and knowledge in a particular place. For example working with museum curators and archivists within collections and archives or gaining permission to work in a specific place, landscape or organisation
- A way for artists to broaden their audience and engagement with the public by being outside a gallery space
- Residencies can provide a particular structure and endpoint for a period of development and practice by incorporating a final exhibition, artist's talk or participatory activity
- A time and a place of risk (both positive and negative) for the residency host and the artist – the outcomes are not always expected
- A catalyst – altering the way a place or space can be seen and experienced by artists, hosts and visitors

Discussion: The benefits and challenges of residencies

Much of the discussion focused on artists working within organisations such as museums or heritage settings rather than a residency as a retreat or separate experience with development of the artist's practice as a sole outcome.

Benefits for artists can include:

- Discovering new and rich seams of content and material – gaining access to new spaces, places and people can shift an artist's practice and prompt new ways of working
- Residencies often provide a specific timeframe for intense research into particular themes, subjects, materials or methods
- Being able to revisit and be part of a space/place of interest to the artist is valuable, particularly if the artist does not have dedicated studio space.
- Residencies are often opportunities to work collaboratively and in partnership with other artists and professionals - something which can be difficult to achieve as an independent artist
- Using a residency as a laboratory, experimenting with new ideas and presenting them informally to the host, employees and visitors – getting a different perspective on work and practice
- Developing new and potentially different audiences for their work by introducing visitors to their work and artistic practice in general

Benefits for residency hosts can include:

- Reinvigorating places or collections by allowing contemporary artists to work within them in a new, sometimes challenging way
- Highlighting lesser known elements of a place or overlooked parts of a collection by the artist's specific attention and interest
- Artists were described as 'bridges' or 'conduits', providing a new way of looking at collections, places or spaces
- The potential to enrich visitor experience, providing a different perspective for new and repeat visitors
- Broadening audiences for collections or places, for example, bringing a contemporary art audience into a place known more for its heritage, landscape or connections to a particular historical figure

The challenges of residencies

There are many types of residency and ways of organising them. Some are established through open calls or a submission process organised by the residency host. Often artists approach residency hosts directly, some organisations invite specific artists. Residencies can be arranged and agreed using formal, contractual agreement and others develop through a process of negotiation and continual discussion between artist and host. Challenges vary from project to project. Some of the issues raised included:

- Ensuring that the expectations of artist and host are established early in the project including organising and communicating the practical aspects of the residency clearly and transparently
- Funding is a challenge for both artists and organisations. Again, there seem to be a variety of models and methods of funding residencies. Often projects are developed by both the artist and host and joint funding applications are made. This formal funding application can be useful as a project planning tool – addressing many practicalities whilst working through funding applications. Some hosts are able to raise funding before offering the residency opportunity through an open call or submission process. Sometimes access to a particular place is offered as 'support-in-kind' rather than a specific financial contribution. Again a clear agreement and understanding of the financial aspects of a residency is important for both artist and host.
- Establishing the parameters of the residency is important in relation to public engagement: is the artist expected to offer workshops and 'open studio' time as part of the project? How does this balance with time and opportunity for the artist to develop their own practice and response to the residency?
- The practical realities of a residency may differ from the artist's and host's expectations – an artist may not be used to working within an organisation, an organisation may not be fully aware of the artist's particular needs in relation to developing their artistic practice before the project is on-site. Again – a commitment to collaboration and discussion throughout any project seems to be a vital element of the process.

Practical & logistical issues

Every residency has a particular set of practicalities depending on the site, its location and its history as well as the individual artist and the host organisation. Discussions touched on a number of practicalities that need to be considered and agreed, as far as possible at the beginning of a project:

- The basics: for example artists' fees, support-in-kind, materials and travel budgets, on-site location of the artist
- Equipment – depending on an artist's practice different types of studio space will be needed
- Whether there is an element of public engagement within the residency and, if so, are there policies in place for working with the public, particularly vulnerable and/or young people
- Is there an expected outcome such as an exhibition or an artist's talk
- Legalities such as insurance, copyright and permissions

Symposium Summary

Several themes emerged from the discussions:

- Who and what are residencies for and what are the expectations surrounding a residency for artists, hosts, the audiences and, indeed, the funding and supporting organisations?
- How can artists and organisations initiate, plan and develop their residency projects to allow for negotiation but to make expectations and needs as clear as possible from the outset?
- How can the outputs from residencies be captured and developed? Many residencies incorporate participatory workshops, exhibitions and artist's talks but how can that learning be shared more widely beyond the residency timeframe?
- A key element of planning and developing a residency appears to be clear communication and co-operation from the outset with both hosts and artists recognising the mutual benefit residencies can bring to all parties, including audiences.
- Residencies offer opportunities for artists at all stages of their careers and are a way for artists to collaborate with a range of professionals and gain access to places and artefacts that can develop and enhance their practice.

Possibilities for sharing learning and experience

Residencies are often entrepreneurial endeavours – with artists and hosts bringing residencies to fruition by making joint bids and sourcing funding from a variety of places – these innovative models and methods of collaborative working could be shared more widely

It would be useful to share the practical aspects of residencies for both hosts and artists. One suggestion would be to develop a tool-kit or checklist to support the initial planning and development of projects.

The idea of additional seminars, training or events around residencies was welcomed with a view to bring together a wider group of artists, curators, hosts and arts organisers and to continue the discussions initiated at this meeting. The opportunity to explore funding possibilities and to get a broader view of residencies regionally and nationally was also of interest to some participants.

And finally...

It is clear through the discussions at the event and response to the exhibition in general that there is an interest in residencies as an integral part of many artist's practice and as a way to see places differently. Individual residencies provide 'added value' with benefits to artist and host often exceeding planned expectations. From extending and developing an artistic practice to broadening audiences for both hosts and artists, residencies act as a powerful catalyst for creativity in a wide range of places and spaces.

This report, written by Janice Botterill, is a summary of talks, presentations and discussions at 'A time and a place' Symposium. Thank you to the speakers and those who attended the event for their contributions to the discussion and debate. The event was funded by Arts Council England and supported by New Brewery Arts and Visual Arts South West.



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