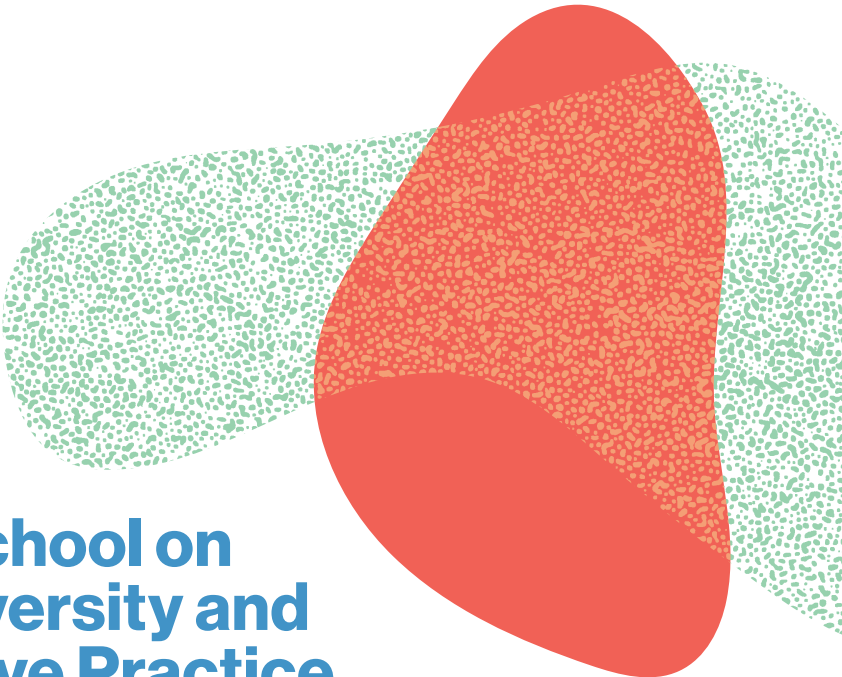






Summer School on Cultural Diversity and Collaborative Practice

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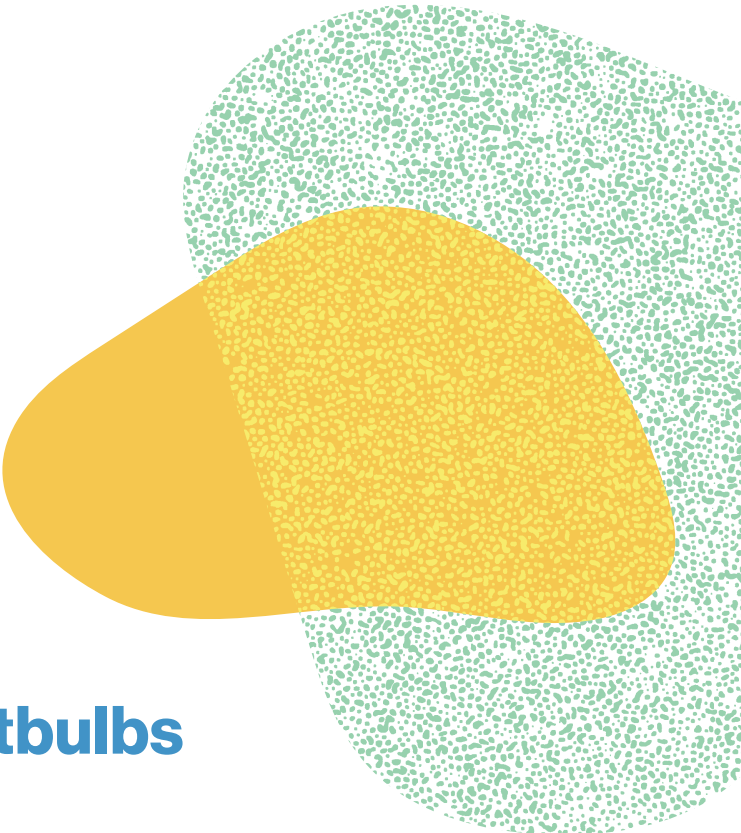
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Changing Lightbulbs

Damien McGlynn

When we think back to 2018, it often feels like a different time.

The before times. This was when the first Summer School was held by Create in collaboration with Counterpoints Arts. We have all been through a lot since then and the context in which we work has changed significantly. However, Create's core remit of supporting collaborative artists and communities to create exceptional art together has not changed.

Shortly after the launch of the School, we published *Connect Create Change*, our strategy for 2020 – 2025, which sets out our vision and strategic goals for this period. Goals one and five, in particular, focus on creating innovative opportunities for artists to develop their practice, and Create's role as a network forum for international knowledge about collaborative arts. The Summer School, in its various



forms over the last five years, has been central to the realisation of these goals.

Create provides training, CPD workshops, bursaries, and mentorship through other aspects of our programme, but the Summer School facilitates an experience similar to those formative moments we experience in education. The opportunity to dedicate time, among peers, to really interrogate central issues in how collaborative artists work today is incredibly valuable.

Attending school, further education, art college, shapes who we are and how we operate.

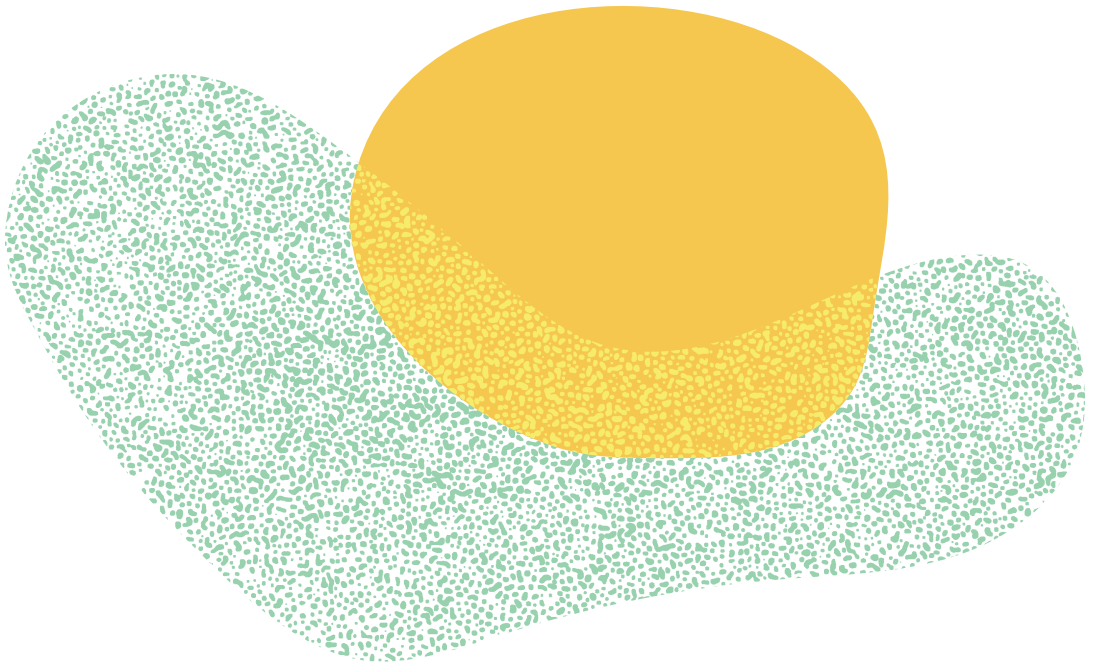
The influence of those around us is undeniable, and the time to think, test and discuss work with others facilitates significant growth and development. However, we tend to have limited chances to continue this way of learning later in life. We are often more

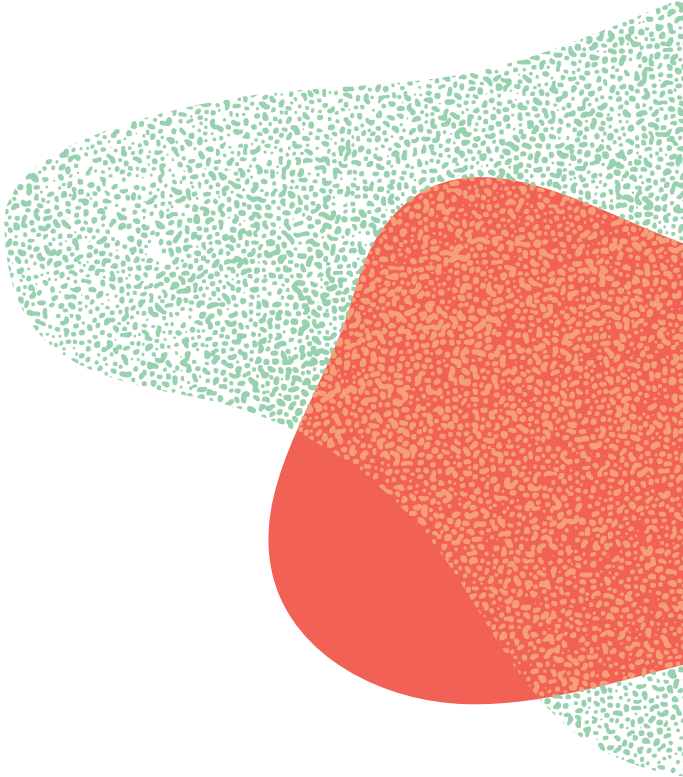
individualistic in our practice and access short-form training and networking opportunities intermittently if we have the capacity at all.

The time and space that the Summer School offers to focus on your work and develop deep connections with a diverse collective of peers is described in Áine O'Brien's essay later in this publication as a "creative crossroads." There is something unique that happens in this co-created space that can – and does – spark changes in how School alumni think and view their practice. These lightbulb moments come from sustained engagement in critical thinking with a network of new connections. And this network exists beyond the life of the School, offering peer to peer support and advice as alumni navigate their often demanding and multi-faceted roles in the collaborative, socially engaged arts landscape.

Create and Counterpoints Arts' ability to bring international practitioners into the School space is key to this dynamic and provides new perspectives and critical viewpoints in discussions of each other's practice, a process which would be far beyond the scope of a single workshop. Facilitating these exchanges between participants and allowing challenges and ideas to percolate and then be interrogated again over the course of the week provides for the kind of in-depth consideration required to really unpick one's practice and start to illuminate a path forward.

Create is incredibly grateful to The Arts Council for their support of the Summer School, and of course to Áine O'Brien and Counterpoints Arts for working with us to imagine and reimagine its form each year. The conscientious work of our own team, in particular Áine Crowley and Jane O'Rourke, is an essential ingredient in the magic of the School. We are, of course, indebted to all the artists, activists, facilitators, and other collaborators who have helped to instigate, develop, and sustain the Summer School in its first five years. The space is activated in an incredibly special way by their boundless creativity and willingness to engage with each other as collaborators, thinkers and doers and we hope that this will continue for many more years.





Summer School on Collaborative Practice and Social Change: Towards the Future

Dr Áine O'Brien

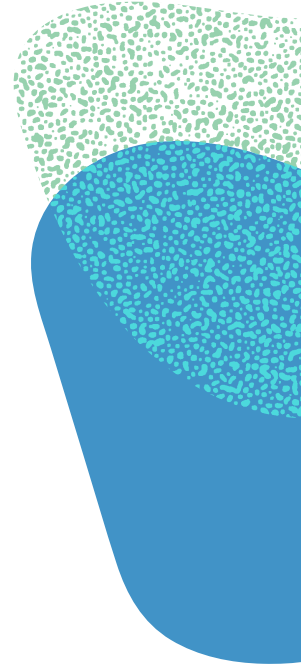
The Summer School was established five years ago. Beginning in 2018 in Carlingford near the Cooley Peninsula, it moved west to Killary Harbour in 2019. Out of necessity, it migrated online during the pandemic in 2020 and 2021, returning to Killary in 2022. In many ways, the School has travelled through a tumultuous period, during which time the impact of the pandemic took its heaviest toll on local communities everywhere.

The very first gathering in 2018 brought together artists, activists, curators and producers, many of whom had found relative refuge and different experiences of belonging on the island of Ireland. From a rudimentary sketch on paper, the School was designed as an experiment in collaborative pedagogy and (un)learning, where artists and others were invited to step away from the demands of the everyday to exchange new ideas in a mutually supportive, co-creative environment.

I have a clear memory of a conversation with Ailbhe Murphy, Director of Create (2015–2022), when we first sat down to talk about what a school might look like and do. We shared an ambition to position pedagogy at the centre of socially engaged practice, to facilitate a space that could enable such a vision, what Pablo Helguera calls ‘the embodiment of the process, on the dialogue, on the exchange, on intersubjective communication, and on human relationships’.¹ As the School has grown, so has the ecosystem of artists who have participated throughout the last five years – a network reflected in this 2023 publication. The collaboration between Create and Counterpoints Arts has also influenced the organic structure of the School with each organisation sharing know-how, skills, and wider networks with a combined sense of what could be practically achieved through a politics of cross-border exchange and solidarity.

The ethics and values of ‘social engagement’ shape the texture of the School’s curriculum, not narrowly as theoretical abstraction (though we do not shy away from critical thinking at the School), but rather as a set of imaginative tools grounding the practice in the complexities and contradictions of everyday life. The concept of the everyday is decidedly international rather than exclusively local in form. The School is influenced by a singular assumption: that socially engaged practice is always already informed by an ‘elsewhere’, alongside a politics of location and place, which takes its cue from the late cultural geographer, Doreen Massey:

1 Pablo Huelguera, “A Bad Education,” Interview by Helen Reed, *The Pedagogical Impulse*, <https://thepedagogicalimpulse.com/a-bad-education-helen-reed-interviews-pablo-helguera/>.





It is a sense of place, an understanding of ‘its character’, which can only be constructed by linking that place to places beyond. A progressive sense of place would recognize that, without being threatened by it. What we need, it seems to me, is a global sense of the local, a global sense of place.²

There is a delicate balance struck between the Summer School’s ‘home’ in Killary, looking out at the Fjord – an Caoláire Rua – and the diverse aspirations and global/local sensibilities of the artists and visiting facilitators. Every year we welcome a range of facilitators from different elsewhere(s), comprising a vital part of a community of (un)learners, who together influence the interdisciplinary ethos underpinning the School.

² Doreen Massey, “A Global Sense of Place,” *Marxism Today* (June 1991): 24-29, http://www.amielandmelburn.org.uk/collections/mt/index_frame.htm.

The programme has included a rich list of practitioners: from Khaled Barakeh and Mary Ann DeVlieg, together with Isabel Lima, Caroline Bergvall, Abdullah AlKafri, Juan delGado, Dana Olărescu, Ismail Einashe, Kit Braybrooke, Dominik Czechowski, Nike Jonah, Natalia Palombo, Sarah Allen, and the Haven for Artists Collective.³

In many ways, the School operates as a creative crossroads, with the focus pivoting around facilitators' areas of production, research and organisational preoccupations – resulting in a mixed bag of conversations with participating artists contributing through the lens of their practice, while, at the same time, encouraged to question the boundaries of that very practice. Akin to the conviviality that is enacted between artists, several of the visiting facilitators continue to cross paths following their engagement at the School. One example can be found in the Beyond the Now collective – a socially engaged platform and syndicate established during the pandemic to create cross-border projects, partnerships, and affinities.⁴

Each year we ask facilitators to reflect on the trajectory of the School and how it might evolve as an infrastructure as part of a wider ecosystem. This inquiry serves as a yearly evaluative gauge or testing of the waters as to the 'value' of the School within and beyond the island of Ireland; not 'growth for growth's sake' but rather in the vein of what cultural economist Mark Banks describes as the intrinsic (often hidden) value of

3 Khaled Barakeh (Artist and Director of Co Culture); Mary Ann DeVlieg (Researcher and International Rights Advisor); Isabel Lima (Socially Engaged Artist and Researcher/Activist); Caroline Bergvall (Artist/Performer and Researcher); Abdullah AlKafri (Dramaturge and Director Ettijahat – Independent Culture); Juan delGado (Filmmaker and Artist/Activist); Dana Olărescu (Socially Engaged Artist/Activist); Ismail Einashe (Investigative Journalist/Activist), Kit Braybrooke (Digital Anthropologist/Designer); Dominik Czechowski (Curator and Researcher); Nike Jonah (Producer and Researcher); Natalia Palombo (Curator and Director of Deveron Arts), Sarah Allen (Director and Curator Mozilla Festival); and the Haven for Artists Collective (Artists Collective Beirut).

4 Beyond the Now is a syndicated online platform, founded by partners working in locations across Europe and the Southwest Asian and North African region. It 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. Beyond the Now was established during COVID-19 (May 2020) with the goal of creating greater solidarity and collaboration between organisations and individuals working within the interdisciplinary field of socially engaged art practice. The Beyond the Now partners comprise small to medium arts organisations and educational institutions: Ettijahat Independent Culture (Beirut and Brussels), Co Culture (Berlin), Create (Ireland), and Counterpoints Arts, (UK) in addition to individual researchers working at the Open University and Arts University Plymouth (UK) and the Mozilla Festival (Berlin/Amsterdam London). <https://beyond-the-now.com/>.

infrastructures shaped by ‘non-capitalistic economic practices’:

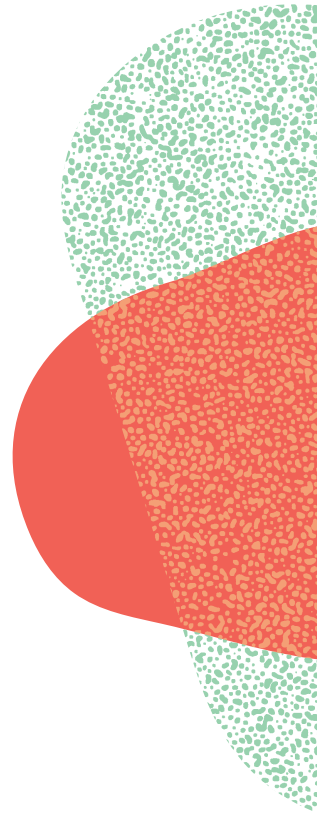
[M]any of the cultural values that inspire [creative] practitioners derive their energies from spheres of life that have the potential to directly conflict with growth imperatives – such as public worlds of politics and social concern, as well as private worlds of love, friendship, conviviality and care.⁵

Banks’ argument is timely in understanding how the concept of ‘value’ might operate in an initiative such as the Summer School:

Properly understood – and socially supported – cultural industries are not merely industries, but forms of social practice that can challenge accepted orthodoxies and provide the conceptual resources for creating images of alternative possible worlds – “dream factories” in the broadest possible sense. In this respect, any motive for working (or engaging) in culture might be related to “making a living”, but it might also be about making a life.

The axis between the imperative of making a ‘living’ alongside making a ‘life’ is challenging if not predictably precarious; navigating such an axis is arguably a central dynamic of socially engaged and

⁵ Mark Banks, (2018) “Creative economies of tomorrow? Limits to growth and the uncertain future,” *Cultural Trends*, 27, 5 (2018): 367-380, DOI: 10.1080/09548963.2018.1534720.



collaborative practice. How we learn to navigate this axis alongside communities of place is another question, altogether.

Significantly, Banks opens a wider conversation about how infrastructures like the Summer School might foreground ‘non-capitalistic economic practices’ in the exploration of new models of pedagogy and knowledge production for artists and cultural actors and activists.

Echoing Banks and casting her eye to the future of the Summer School, artist Dana Olărescu noted:

The Summer School provides a crucial insight into the ethics and foundations of collaborative practice; it asks difficult questions, acts as a critical friend, a toolkit and a caring intersectional space. I hope the School doesn’t grow in a traditional way, as growth is nothing but a capitalist concept, but that it uses its existing networks and resources to share the acquired knowledge with international practitioners. I hope it continues to build solidarity in the arts sector and beyond.

Or as curator and writer Dominik Czechowski observed, the School has the potential to forge a larger set of alliances and partnerships, but following Banks, should do so with care:

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I’d like to see the School’s open, relational, anti-racist and anti-capitalist model expand to build a transnational framework of alliances and partnerships.

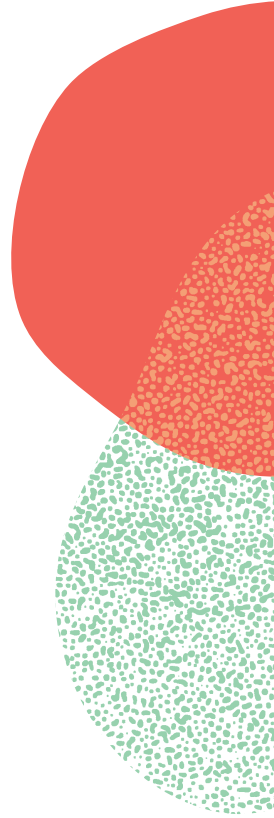


At a time of global political crises that urgently require new ideas for how to live and work together, I'd like to see the School's open, relational, anti-racist and anti-capitalist model expand to build a transnational framework of alliances and partnerships. By actively developing a network of new relations and connecting with existing international initiatives and alternative pedagogical models. Co-designing reciprocal residential exchange programmes as platforms that host and bring together different practices for collaborative (un) learning.

For the dramaturge Abdullah Alkafri, the Summer School's value lies in its ability, much like Massey, to focus on a 'global sense of the local':

The Summer School is a unique space when it comes to sharing big yet also delicate questions related to the connection between art and community, without having to compromise. The format of the Summer School raises the question from two critical and interconnected perspectives: respecting the different artistic specialities of the participants alongside what are increasing levels of injustice experienced within and between communities. We need spaces like the School, so that artists can understand their critical role in such a demanding context, enabling them to share experiences and to interrogate their own practices. To also think 'internationally', while, at the same time, understanding that we fundamentally start everything from some form of the 'local'. The challenge is in understanding the complexity of that local in a wider global and interconnected context.

In continuing to gather viewpoints from artists and facilitators and having reached the five-year mark, we look forward to developing the next stages of the Summer School. Sections of this 2023 publication contribute to this process-led reflection, allowing for a



gathering of diverse needs and standpoints from artists attending throughout the years plus a mapping of the alumni's achievements. We aim to embed different types of storytelling as a method of evaluation going forward to shape an essential part of the School's pedagogy and practice, to aid in its own internal (un)learning, to allow for the dreaming of 'alternative possible worlds', as Banks writes.

It is fitting to end my framing of the Summer School – as to what it is and could be – with the words of a previous participant and alumni, the filmmaker and socially engaged artist, Jijo Sebastian:

Summer School was a unique experience.

Made a lot of friends

Connected with people

Learned a lot.

It was like meeting my tribe: transnational, transcultural tribe,

The in-between people.

During those days I realised why I feel distant from my own community in Ireland (from Kerala, India) and still couldn't feel at home with many aspects of the western/Irish culture either.

It is not like 'have left but never reached'. No, definitely not.

It is like 'have reached equilibrium at last, in the middle'.

Summer School helped me realise that my truth is hybrid

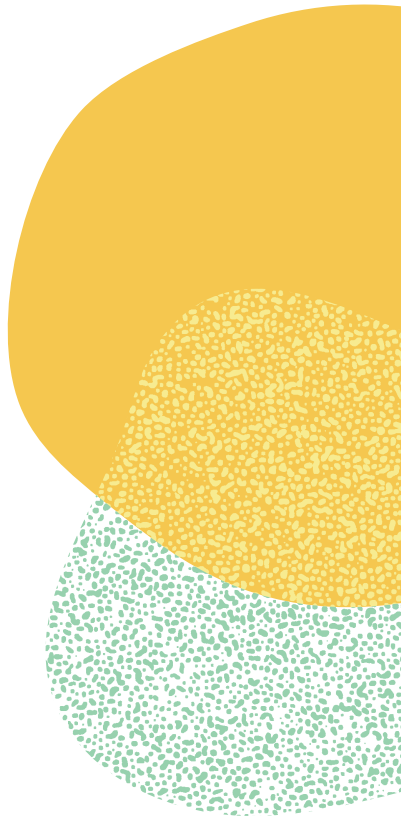
I am at home in the liminal spaces.

Jijo Sebastian, 2022

Evolving Practices and Experiences: a mini ethnography of the Summer School

Alisha Doody

Over the last five years, many of the artists who have attended the Summer School on Cultural Diversity and Collaborative Practice have been supported and encouraged (post Summer School) to develop their practice, whether through Artist in the Community (AIC) Scheme Awards, or other Arts Council Awards. The Summer School has cultivated an impressive alumnus of artists, helping to shape a dynamic ecosystem of projects – rich in its plurality of methodologies and emerging forms of collaborative practice. Create and Counterpoints Arts tasked School alumna Alisha Doody with conducting a mini ethnographic study, capturing evolving practices and experiences of School attendees. Alisha brought her own experience with the School and also as an AIC Scheme funding recipient to bear on this reflection.





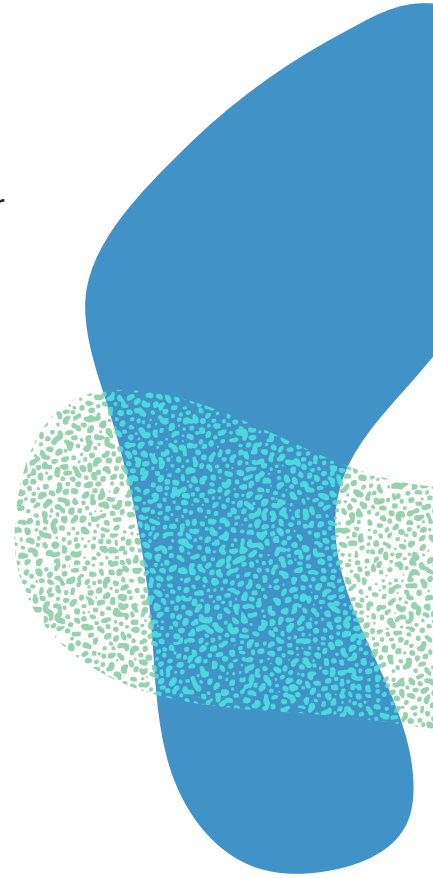
To begin, I want to acknowledge what a privilege it is to be asked to reflect on the practice-led ecosystem that surrounds the Summer School on Cultural Diversity and Collaborative Practice co-developed by Create and Counterpoints Arts. Even more than this I am humbled by the opportunity to reflect on my own experience as well as engaging with four exceptional and diverse artists, Ala Buisir, Jijo Sebastian, Karen Aguiar, and Tomasz Madajczak. Each one has participated at different stages of the School's lifetime and has also received funding and support from Create and the Artist in the Community Scheme during their careers. Having connected with each artist and discussed their experiences of the School and with Create and Counterpoints as organisations, what became apparent in my interviews for this piece was the significant impact that participation at the School had for each of

us, not only for our practices and methodologies but for our sense of identity and connection to the wider field of practice within which we are each working.

Like the political and activist art inspired by 1970s feminism and identity politics, SEA [Socially Engaged Art] usually has an overt agenda, but its emphasis is less on the act of protest than on becoming a platform or a network for the participation of others, so that the effects of the project may outlast its ephemeral presentation.¹

In fact, I cannot help but wonder now if the lasting effects of our participation at the School, of the development of our relationships with others in the field, of finding collaborators and critical friends, were as Pablo Helguera describes above: if engagement with Create and Counterpoints Arts is truly as Tomasz Madajczak describes “a very intimate space where I think there was a lot of trust built. It felt like all the theory that is around socially engaged art practice and all the ethos that Create is trying to translate through their writing, through their meetings, through their organisation, that it was embodied in that meeting”, is it possible that we might understand the Summer School and the organisations that have developed it as the institutional embodiments of a socially engaged practice that we as practitioners in the field always strive to achieve?

¹ Pablo Helguera (2011), *Education for Socially Engaged Art*, Jorge Pinto Books: New York





Over the last number of years, I have explored ideas around the collective development of knowledge within the LGBTQI community in Ireland and I have been facilitated and supported in this research through the support of the Artist in the Community Scheme, managed by Create. In reality though, if we interchange the LGBTQI community with any other marginalised community, explorations such as this are frequently found in the archives of both Research and Development awards and Project Realisation awards that have been funded through the AIC Scheme.

My journey has been formed in part through my educational experiences as I became professionalised in the field through the MA in Socially Engaged Art and Further Education in the National College of Art and Design, Dublin, Ireland, and through the development of Critical Friends – a peer support network for

postgraduates with socially engaged/participatory/ collaborative practice. However, there are also significant, alternative forms of education that artists like myself and others engage with in our careers. Not least of these alternatives is the School offered by cross-border collaborators, Create and Counterpoints Arts. This offers a contemporary space for culturally diverse participants to interrogate what it is that we do, what it means to make collaborative work today, and how we actually do it. Jijo Sebastian reflects powerfully on this when he says “it opened up a transcultural space in my life with artistic and academic networks and opportunities to talk about the films publicly, resulting in my self-identification as an ethnic collaborative filmmaker.” These experiences become formative not only to our understanding of our identity as artists but also of the practice-based methodologies that we employ.

I specified the term “participants” above intentionally because while I might have applied the term artist to myself when I joined the School and applied for funding, that was not the case for everyone I spoke with. Take Ala Buisir for example. Ala and I studied photography together, long before either of us considered ourselves socially engaged artists. We followed different trajectories as undergraduates, mine focused heavily on the histories of socially engaged practice, while Ala who was always deeply engaged with social justice, followed a path into journalism studying for the MA in Journalism at Dublin City University. We both found ourselves supported by the Create and the AIC Scheme and becoming participants

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These experiences become formative not only to our understanding of our identity as artists but also of the practice-based methodologies that we employ.



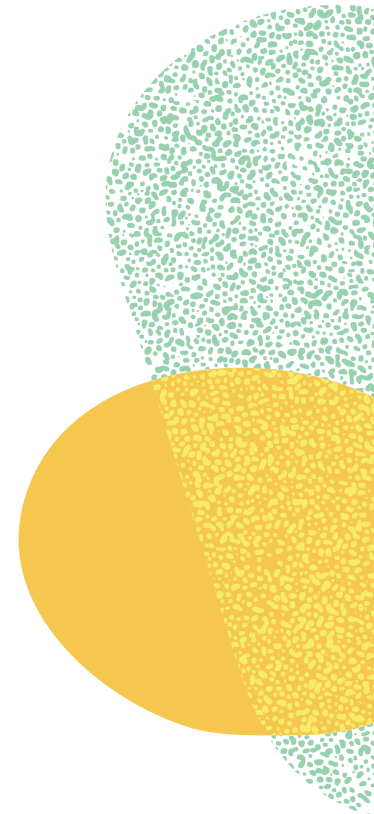
in the School, perhaps in part because of the relational methodologies we employed in our process-led work within our communities, but also perhaps because Create appreciates the breadth of practices that are held within the field. Ala said:

I applied for the Research and Development award with the “Challenging Stereotypes of Muslim Women” project. And as much as I’m part of that community and as much as my voice is also important, it’s always other people’s opinions and how different they are from me. Then the Autumn School helped me understand how to get the communities more involved and how to design the workshops and have a conversation with everyone instead of me trying to figure it out myself.

So if, “one factor of SEA that must be considered is its expansion to include participants from outside the regular circles of art and the art world” (Helguera, 2011) then this is something the School and its organisers facilitate by casting the net of inclusion widely across the field of social, cultural and political organising and bringing those that operate on the margins towards the centre where they can see themselves reflected. For those who are supported by Create and the AIC Scheme, the opportunity to engage in critical questioning, and to develop connections with others across the field allows a level of self-reflection that can shift our perception of ourselves from, in some cases, community facilitator, dancer, gymnast or photojournalist, to socially engaged artist or collaborative filmmaker, etc.

For Karen Aguiar

The time allowed through the award and the mentorship of Kate O’Shea gave me confidence to go for many opportunities and connect with artists and activists who I continue to work with. Due to this award, I had access to see more of what I do as a career, apply for grants, produce meaningful meetings and grow as an artist as well as the migrant community that I am part of. It also allowed me to work with people that I would not have had a chance to work with before and to make things and connections happen.



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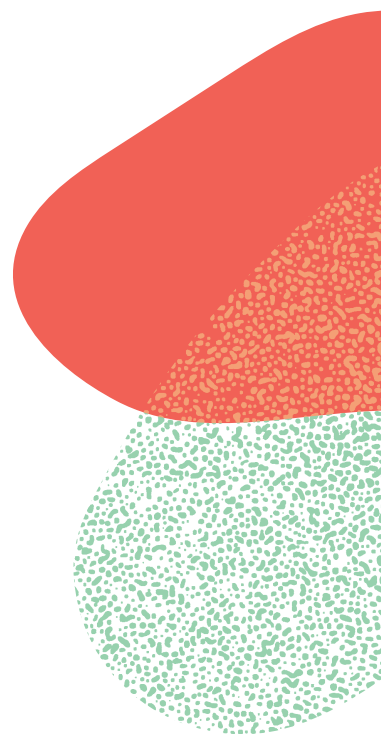
... the opportunity to engage in critical questioning, and to develop connections with others across the field allows a level of self-reflection that can shift our perception of ourselves ...



Significantly, it is not only the development of one's own identity or position as an artist that is apparent from these experiences, it is the development of a network of support for the artist but also for the community with which they are working. With a critical eye for ethical engagements, centering the community at the heart of the work, Create and Counterpoints Arts endeavour to build capacity for artists and empower those communities (which sees the foregrounding of marginalised and culturally diverse communities), who are supported. This is also a major focus of the School and in particular, the MÁK Challenge presented to the participants of the School. The MÁK Challenge rather simply is an opportunity to create an imaginary collaborative large-scale project. Various groups are assigned the

task of collaboratively writing a funding proposal to span a two-year period and in doing so, interrogate their practices and the intentions through which they work. This is a reasonably straightforward task, but it is so much more. What it truly represents is the power of collectivity. It encourages deep engagement with critical questions each artist or participant has in their practices, as well as wider questions relating to cross-disciplinary collaborative efforts at large. It does this in a way where the lines between the imaginary space of the task and our real experiences in our practices are blurred. For all of us, the relationships forged in these moments of collective imagining developed into deeper collaborative engagements. We became bolstered by each other as we left the School and entered into research and development and/or process-led work, work which often sits in a world of uncertainty.

Fundamentally, each artist, myself included, was able to identify some others present in their time at the School with whom they went on to have further conversations or to develop collaborations. Tomasz and Hina Khan went on to develop a workshop for participants in a Direct Provision Centre in Cork. Not only this, but Tomasz also worked on other initiatives with Bernadette Divilly outside of his local community area in Cork. Karen went on to be mentored by another artist, Kate O'Shea, something which she considers transformative to her practice. Ala spoke about her work in the Muslim community in Ireland and how

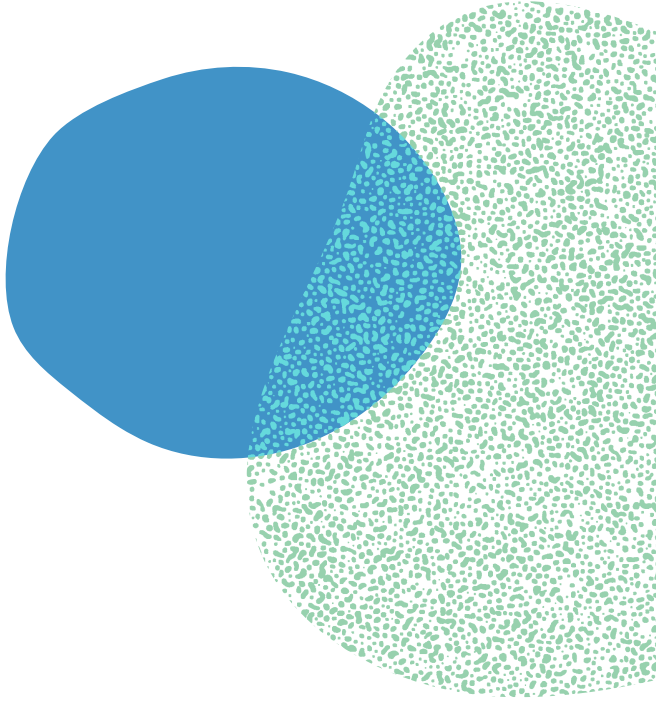


participation has opened up the door for them to consider funding opportunities. Jijo went on to make a newly commissioned collaborative film *Colour of my Breath* with other artists from migrant backgrounds including several School alumni. As for me, I have broadened my network of Critical Friends and supported artists I met at the School.

For each one of us profiled here, there is a spirit of collaboration and openness to one another that outlasts the Schools or the various funding sources of which we have availed. Not only this, but there is a powerful commitment to questioning our motives, our methodologies, and our methods of working in partnership with marginalised communities. As practitioners who are beginning to understand the enriching power of our collaborative relationships, who are becoming more aware of our positionality in one of the most globally culturally diverse fields of practice, the space for critical reflection and networks of solidarity and support that we have been afforded, cannot be underestimated. Not only do those we engage with become critical friends that we lean on for support and advice, but they also become our future collaborators and partners on larger-scale projects, they become mirrors for our understanding of ourselves. So much so that we might consider Create and Counterpoints as meta practitioners whose institutional identities embody socially engaged art in practice and present a model which we as artists can learn from.

“ ”

Not only do those we engage with become critical friends that we lean on for support and advice, but they also become our future collaborators and partners on larger-scale projects.



Funding Applications: A Dog's Eye View

Ella Skolimowski

Ella Skolimowski is a writer-performer creating work for stage and broadcast on the themes of migration, gender and mental health. Originally from London, her family repatriated to Ireland following the Brexit vote. In May 2023, she facilitated workshops exploring the Irish diaspora's response to Brexit at EPIC Dublin, with the support of the Artist in the Community Scheme, an Arts Council initiative managed by Create. Here Ella writes about her experience and approach to writing funding applications, and how her attitude to this work has changed over time.

Imagine an artist. Any artist. Let's imagine they're early on in their careers. They've got potential, talent, and a track record of some sort. They've a good enough sense of the landscape of their art form to be

bewildered by the range of opportunities, deadlines and competitions that *could* help them make their work. And they know that the effort they put into navigating those opportunities is more likely than not going to be rewarded with rejection.

Similarities between our imagined artist and any real person are coincidental – though of course it's me, and it might resonate with your own feelings about navigating your practice too. The most painful hurdle in convincing other people to *let me* make my work is navigating funding competitions. Some days I feel ready to give up on making theatre, and to accept that I am now a professional grant writer, because the admin it takes to make projects happen feels like the bulk of the work I actually do.

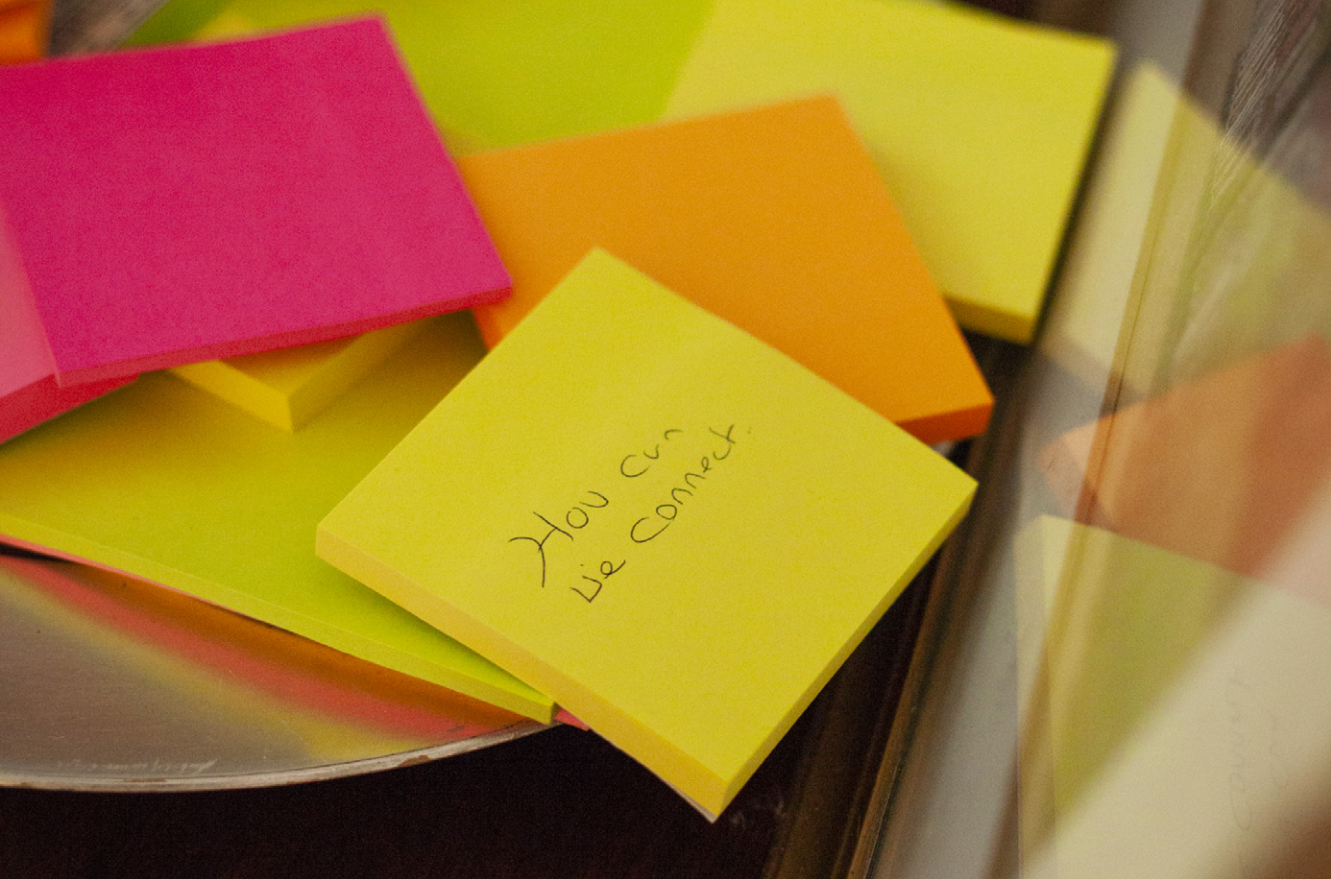
Let's give our tortured artist a companion to support them in their struggles. An emotional support animal, if you will. Yes, let's make the companion a dog. Not just any dog: a show dog. A competitor. A prize winner. A dog with discipline, ambition and drive – everything our reluctant grant-writer-come-artist might lack.

When I sit down to complete an application, I feel like this dog preparing to run an agility course.

I don't fully understand the task ahead, but I want to do my best because there might be a sausage at the end. Explaining your project plans and artistic vision to assessors who may be unfamiliar with your work, or even your art form, is certainly challenging. Some of the information requested doesn't feel connected to your artistic vision, like the budget, timelines, and

“ ”

Let's give our tortured artist a companion to support them in their struggles. An emotional support animal, if you will.



other practical elements. I ask myself: if I don't get the award, is the time I spent on the application wasted, a distraction from the work I should have been doing: making theatre? Crafting answers, taking meetings, chasing Letters of Support, just to see it come to nothing, can be heartbreaking, and the pressures on funding structures being what they are, many of the bodies I have applied to don't even have the capacity to provide actionable feedback with their rejections. It all feels like jumping through hoops, with no guarantee of a sausage at the end.

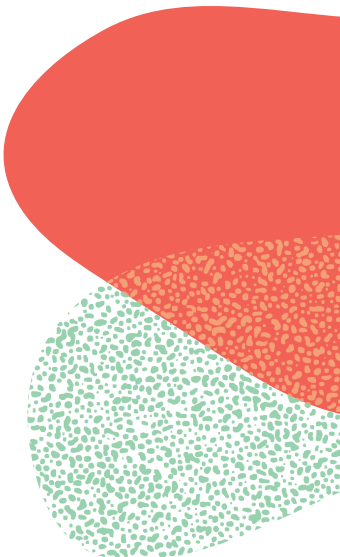
Recently I successfully applied to Artist in the Community (AIC) Scheme to support a theatre project focused on Irish migration to and from the UK, and how it has been complicated by Brexit. That experience has helped me reframe my thinking around the process of applying for funding: to look for opportunity in it,

instead of dismissing it as a chore. What has helped me take a more strategic approach – and be more resilient to rejection – is to think back to that little dog: their optimism, enthusiasm, and their determination to enjoy running the course, regardless of the outcome.

1. Create a map of the course

Your application is a map of the agility course you're about to run. You're applying to complete a project, and projects require management. As well as great vision, funders need to see your map for implementation. I've started asking myself: if I don't get this award, how will the time I've invested in it be useful to my practice? I do actually want to do the project I'm applying to do, but without the structure of applications, I'd never force myself to spend time identifying how it would happen. It's an opportunity to consider: when I *do* do this project, where will I start? What's the first step, and which people and organisations do I need on board to progress from there? Even if an application isn't successful, I'll come away with a plan for how this work will get made. We all have the instinct to find ways to make our work within circumstances that might not feel optimum. I may need to brave jumping the seesaw instead of meandering through the tunnel.

Thinking about delivering the overall project can be more daunting than simply treating the application questions as they stand. Reflecting on your ambitions, your process, and how you will engage people is big-



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As well as great vision, funders need to see your map for implementation.



picture stuff. It can result in notes and ideas that won't make it into the constraints of the application form, or might even be outside the award criteria, but if we've thought our projects through, we will always end up knowing more about them than we can or should put into the form.

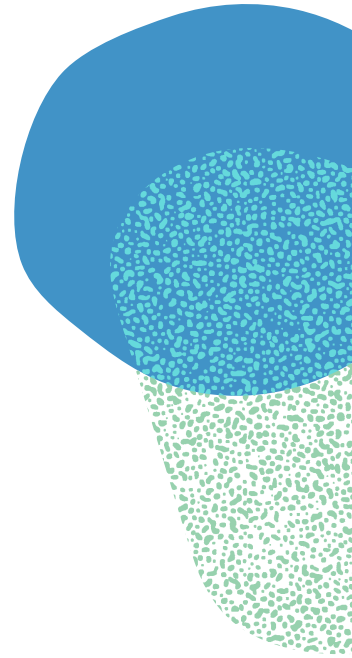
The good news for applicants to the AIC Scheme Research and Development award is that it will support you to devise a complete project plan. You aren't required to have all the answers yet: at application stage, you just need two or three good guiding research questions, and a route to discovering the answers. I'm using my award to see if future collaboration with my chosen community is feasible. I'll build working relationships with them and come away with a map for where the project could go in the future.

2. Find the most efficient path

So, if I know more about my project than I'm able to describe in 1,800 characters: how do I select which elements to include?

My overall project is inherently transnational and trans-historical. It will require a series of workshops and work-in-progress performances, and eventually, it'll need the budget for a complete theatrical production. The Research and Development award won't support the full process, but I can use it to run my initial workshops with communities and document how I'll develop the project from there. The Arts Council only supports work in the Republic of Ireland, which gave me a dilemma: Irish-UK links are integral to my subject, and I couldn't properly represent my vision by omitting them from my proposal. I suggested that, following the Dublin workshops, participants will be invited to share work with Irish community groups in London, if they wish. This shows I've got ideas for future phases, that the project will be shaped by how the community here wants to work, that I've understood the funding criteria, and that I'm focused on starting with that part of the overall work which is within the scope of the award.

Many awards aren't sufficient to realise a complete artistic project, but you can use smaller funds to take a first step. Think about how what you want to do intersects with the aims of funders, and make this the focus of your application. That doesn't mean compromising your idea to fit their structures: it's about finding synergy.



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Many awards aren't sufficient to realise a complete artistic project, but you can use smaller funds to take a first step.



3. The word limit: an applicant's best friend?

Our little dog must not only run the course: they must do it against the clock. This is how I feel about working within answer word limits when the submission deadline looms. I have a background in arts journalism, and I'm slowly untraining myself from using obfuscating artspeak. I had a tight word limit for this article, and I wasted several on a weak analogy about dog shows.

Your application form should be clear and readable by anyone, particularly when you aim to engage non-artists. This is where I find that frustratingly small word limit helpful because it forces me towards clarity and conciseness. It also puts a useful limit on how long I spend on the application. It's not supposed to be a full-time job. Only part-time.

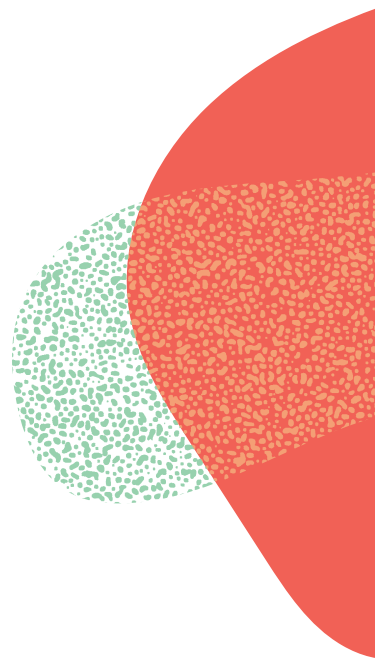
Avoid duplicating information across your answers and your supporting materials. Your CV will show your artistic track record (and it's useful if it shows experience administering arts projects and funding too). Explain why you've chosen this community, organisation, or mentor: the detail of how you'll work together can be covered by Letters of Support.

4. Who's your coach?

Our dog doesn't work out how to run the course all by themselves. That would be an unrealistic expectation. They're only small.

The difference between my successful and unsuccessful applications is whether I gave myself time to get them reviewed. Create is a great source of advice: their rationale is to support exactly this type of work, and the team is committed to building ongoing relationships with communities and artists. I participated in the 2022 Summer School, a concentrated period of reflection for socially-engaged artists about how we can invite communities into our practice, where I considered the guiding principles I'll use to engage communities in this process. For this application, I met with Áine Crowley, Create's Programme Manager, Arts and Engagement who was a fantastic sounding board for the overall project.

Create also helped connect me to my mentor Bernie O'Reilly, who reviewed my proposal. This allowed us to shape the project together, working in partnership from



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The difference between my successful and unsuccessful applications is whether I gave myself time to get them reviewed.

the application stage. Sharing materials with partner organisations and community participants also helps: they might not work in your art form or have intimate knowledge of your practice, so they'll check the sense and clarity from a more objective perspective.

Attend application workshops run by artists' unions, go to funder's information sessions, and seek meetings with funding bodies. It is not easy to do this last one in practice, because many organisations only have the capacity for these conversations when a deadline approaches, but finding opportunities to meet and ask questions outside application schedules gives you a chance to plan your applications strategically, rather than just reacting when you see a scheme open.

5. Eyes on the prize

Above all, when you're desperately trying to get an answer down from 303 words to 300 at midnight before the deadline, remember that getting resources to make your work isn't a distraction from your creative practice: it's what facilitates it.

Everybody is a *Dancing Body*: Using Dance, Talking Circles, and Empathy to Transcend Cultural and Emotional Barriers

Tatiana Santos

Tatiana Santos is a Socially Engaged Dance Artist, Cultural Mediator, and Social Justice Advocate, currently the Artist in Residence at Mother Tongues. She has a Master's Degree in Dispute Resolution, focused on the potential of conflict transformation to tackle racism. Since 2018, Tatiana has facilitated talking circles and dance workshops to foster equity and integration, having worked with the Immigrant Council of Ireland, Dublin City Council and the Education and Training Board. In this contribution, Tatiana writes about her creative practice and methodology of mobilising storytelling and dance as tools for racial and social justice, allowing voices and narratives – previously 'silenced' and marginalised – to be heard.

As a language enthusiast, it is fascinating to consider literal translations from one language to another. For instance, when translating the pronoun “everybody” from English to Portuguese, my mother tongue, the etymology of “body” refers to the “sense of person.” In Portuguese, “body” is replaced by the word “corpo”, which translates back to “human organism” or “flesh”. On the other hand, if you want to say “everybody” in Brazilian Portuguese, you must say “todo mundo” (meaning “every world”). This transformation of “everybody” to “todo mundo” in Portuguese prompts us to consider the implications and politics of collaboration as it relates to dance: are we individual bodies finding synchronicity in our differences, or are we one unique functional world, aware or not of individualities? How might dance as a popular art form enable communities to come together, to listen to each other in increasingly divisive times?

Dance has long been a symbol of cultural identity, allowing people to express themselves through movement and connect with others. However, the concepts of “right” and “wrong” continue to permeate the field. I am not referring here to the standards imposed in the context of formal training for those seeking professional enhancement. Clearly, formal training provides a structured and technical approach to steps and choreography. But it is also important to recognise that dance serves as a manifestation of a basic human need, such as ‘freedom of expression’.

Historically, dancing has formed an essential part of life, used as a method of communication, celebration,

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Dance has long been a symbol of cultural identity, allowing people to express themselves through movement and connect with others.



a way to express emotions, heal, and tell stories. And as contemporary communities seek to tell their stories, especially against the grain of white dominant narratives that do not relate to communities living in and from the Global South, it is crucial to recognise the significant collaborative and political role of dance.

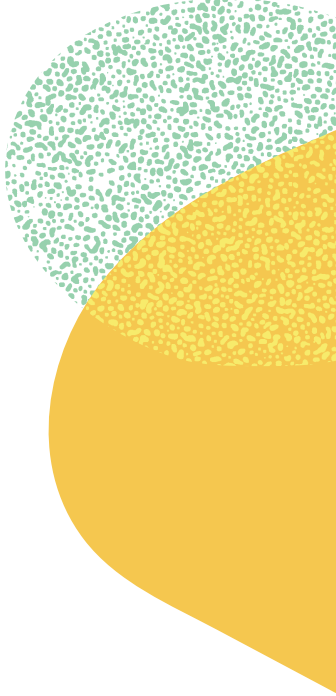
My journey as a dance artist in Ireland began from the need to find a safe space to connect with my roots, my ethnicity, the drum beats; the necessity of liberating the body, from both physical and mental colonial ties. I see dance as an opportunity to look at my body with gratitude and compassion, regardless of its shape or weight. The *dancing body* does not have to seek perfection (what I refer to here as the *dancing body* is ‘everybody’: every moving human organism, flesh, and blood). Everybody is a *dancing body*.

In Ireland, my first mentor was a black woman. Bami Kuteyi would wear cropped tops, braids in different colours from time to time, and welcome you with the biggest of smiles. Bami articulated her work as a dance instructor and entrepreneur from her own experience of displacement in the corporate environment. Her story is relatable to me. So much so that, as she often reiterated, the space fostered by her (in a small studio in Dublin 2 that briefly would be replaced by an enormous studio close to The Point Luas stop) had no room for competition but instead advocated pure liberation, cooperation, and self-indulgence. In the Western world, as colonised as our bodies can be, from women being told to “keep up the good manners” to blue and pink clothes being coded for “boys” and “girls,” the legacies of colonialism repeatedly misrepresent and are at odds with the lived experiences and diverse realities of our everyday lives.

Having a black woman as my first mentor in Ireland and my first black mentor in twenty-two years of practice taught me a valuable lesson about pollinating diversity of ideas and empathy in dance: to collaborate successfully, we must be devoted to comprehending and conveying our peers’ thoughts and feelings, and to facilitate multiple narratives about our embodied selves and our senses of cultural identity.

Humanising the self, humanising each other

A common belief exists that dancers should possess a particular body type, generally characterised



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... the legacies of colonialism repeatedly misrepresent and are at odds with the lived experiences and diverse realities of our everyday lives.



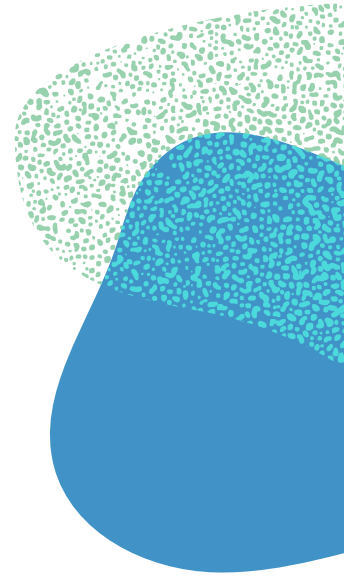
by slimness and a specific physique. According to “Disordered Eating and Body Image Concerns in Dancers: A Systematic Review” (conducted by a team of researchers from the University of Hildesheim in Germany and published in the journal *Medical Problems of Performing Artists* in 2020), dancers across various genres and levels of expertise showed higher levels of body dissatisfaction and more negative attitudes towards eating than non-dancers. Significantly there's a close link between low self-esteem and what I refer to as the *dancing body*.

As a dance facilitator, I often hear participants express dissatisfaction at first, feeling unable to move, undeserving of pleasure as they liberate their bodies, either due to guilt or shame/fear of being observed, or both. The exposure to tempo, range, and span is part of musicality, which provides the *dancing body* with fluidity

and improved coordination. However, the absence of or limited exposure to those elements is often mistaken for a lack of aptitude. Additionally, participants at times attribute their self-consciousness to what they call “church repression” – intriguingly when the practices focus mostly on hips and pelvis. It is in this context that the ‘talking circle’ (a methodology I have implemented over several years) opens a space for participants to tap into their inherited discomfort, where we begin to talk about the ‘body’ in depth.

The ‘talking circle’ is essentially a live, organic, empirical method that is initiated where and when dancing bodies are present, encouraging the dancers to become more acutely aware of their existence. Every participant in the ‘talking circle’ is (at least momentarily) on equal footing, vulnerable, reflecting on the societal constructions that have brought us together: some bold, some shy, some bound to the idea of beauty standards, and some proud of who they have become. Suddenly, conversations are not exclusively about the *dancing body*, but about the body, the self, and the political space we all occupy in our cultural and social systems.

Difficult topics emerge in the ‘talking circle’, yet the dance practice transforms the space, enabling individuals to recognise the shared humanity that exists between them while providing a platform for developing a sense of belonging. The main goal has never been to come up with solutions for any problem, but to simply be able to hear and be heard in polarised times, in a transcultural environment that can also be divisive.



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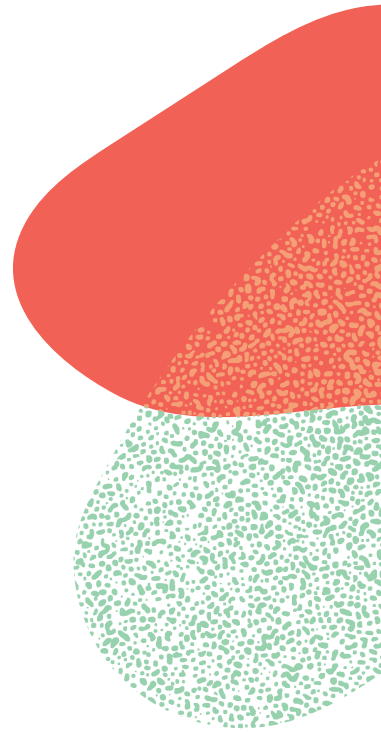


The use of dance and ‘talking circles’ in transcultural contexts has gained significant traction. This is because these activities offer individuals the opportunity to express themselves without the restrictions of language or cultural obstacles. Through movement, people can communicate their sentiments, memories, and aspirations in ways that words cannot. Similarly, talking circles create a space for participants to narrate their own stories and experiences, while also allowing them to explore their emotions in a safe and non-judgemental environment.

The practice of non-European dance styles, such as Kuduro from Angola, Kakilambe from Guinea and Mali, or, specifically in this context, Afro-Brazilian Funk, can be particularly beneficial to those managing self-consciousness. In contrast to more rigid dance styles, such as classical ballet, Afro-Brazilian Funk techniques

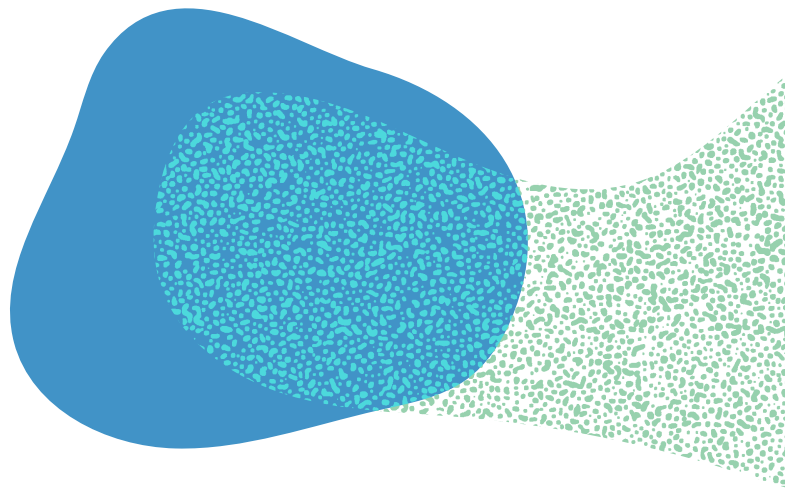
prioritise body liberation, offering participants the opportunity to free themselves of inhibitions and explore their emotions through movement. It is no coincidence that the steps and structure of those rhythms, which originated in Africa, embrace celebration and courtship movements from different cultures. Pelvic movements, the foundation of Afro-Brazilian Funk, seen in the Western world as dirty and sinful, are for many a sacred manifestation of fertility. It all depends on the storyteller.

Beyond the physical and mental challenges which can be beneficial and constructive, dance practice goals can be as simple as fulfilling the need for self-expression and connection – just as our ancestors did long ago. Emphasising the freedom for participants to move in a way that feels natural to them and express their frustrations through dance creates a cooperative environment, rather than a competitive one. This is not to say that competition is inherently bad – in many situations, it's natural and necessary, and even appreciated. For example, this applies in the labour market, when applying for a job position. Yet we can also embrace the notion of 'positive competition' when aligned with the necessity and value of collaboration. Where we strive to stand on the same ground, release the fear of judgement, and balance power dynamics by showing vulnerability. These actions not only humanise others but also ourselves – especially in a world that demands so-called perfection on a daily basis.



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... dance practice goals can be as simple as fulfilling the need for self-expression and connection ...



Exploring an Ecosystem of Support for Collaborative Artists

Áine Crowley

My contribution to this issue of *Field Notes* includes a map of the ecosystem of artists with whom I work in my capacity as Programme Manager, Arts and Engagement at Create and at the annual Summer School. This map illustrates the different forms of practice and the depth of projects and networks that have emerged in and around connections made at the Summer School over the past five years. Many of these projects are facilitated through the Artist in the Community Scheme via Research and Development and Project Realisation Awards and with supplemental and crucial supports offered by Create. Noted in this map (beautifully drawn by William Bock, an alumnus of the Summer School) is the sheer range and scope of the collaborative alliances that have increasingly been forged between artists across the five years of the Summer School.



This is an important map since it provides concrete evidence of an emerging culture initiated and carried by artists who have participated in the School. Despite its community focus, collaborative and socially engaged art can be a lonely practice, as reflected in a previous issue of *Field Notes*, by Summer School facilitator Isabel Lima:

there aren't many spaces for peers to talk to each other, and to exchange methodologies and discuss the problems and struggles of practising as an artist. Everyone's got this invaluable knowledge. But our work in collaborative practice and socially engaged practice can be very lonely...

Increasingly, artists find themselves working solo in differently sensitive contexts, requiring more than just artistic skills.

In many respects artistic production is only one ingredient in the production process underpinning socially engaged arts practice. We cannot see the invisible skills and the required levels of care, generosity and attentiveness demonstrated by artists to others. As a developmental and resource organisation, Create understands that artistic production is only one part of a more encompassing and complex practice, only one part of an interconnected set of methods and necessary skills. What is increasingly required is a much wider ecosystem of production, an ecosystem generated and regenerated by artists themselves and their allies. And which we can readily see in the map presented here.

There are inevitable challenges associated with collaborative and socially engaged arts practice. For the practice to be impactful it needs to be relational not transactional, durational not occasional. Some questions come to mind when thinking about how to create and sustain an infrastructure that can facilitate such a grounding of support and continuous nurturing for artists and between artists and communities.

- How do we recognise artists' unseen, invisible work so that this, too, is valued?
- How do we create structures around artists and artists' networks to secure and protect the rich

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What is increasingly required is a much wider ecosystem of production, an ecosystem generated and regenerated by artists themselves and their allies.



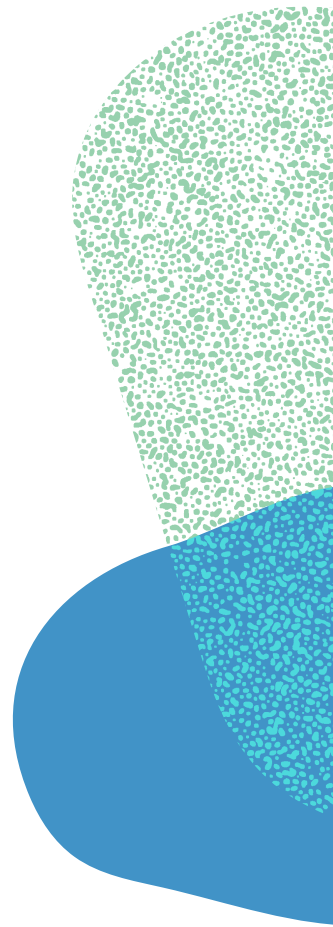
ecology that they have activated?

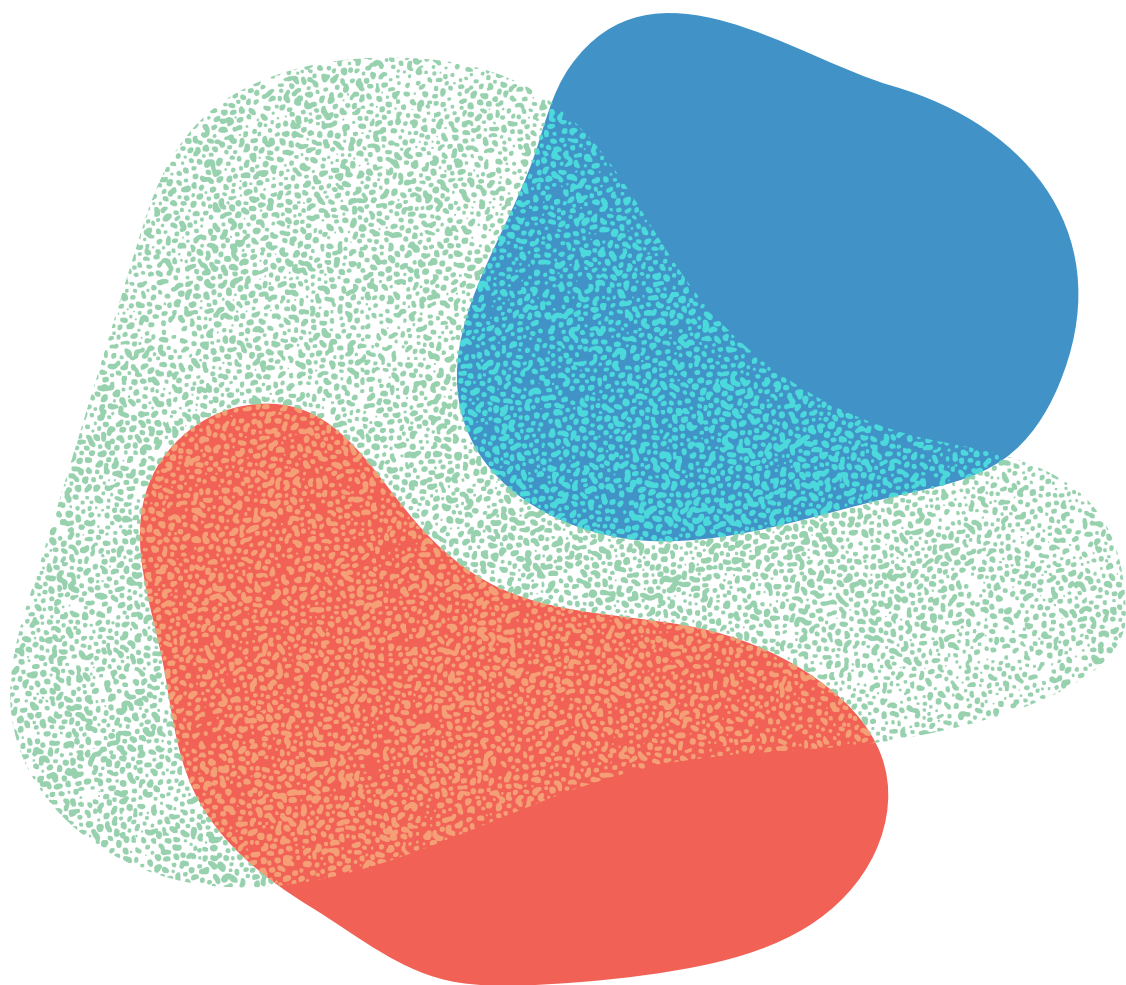
- How do we accommodate the artist with an established studio practice who finds themselves moving into the space of collaborative socially engaged arts?
- How can the recently graduated or emerging artist be best supported and encouraged to imagine the next stage of their practice?
- How do we equally recognise artists who for a range of reasons find themselves on the margins and feel that they are underrepresented in the field of collaborative, socially engaged practice?
- Or, indeed, the artist with a strong track record but 'burnt out' from an oppressive workload, or from lack of resourcing and carrying the burden of trying to sustain their practice?

In many ways, these questions are intentionally framed as challenges, in that they epitomise the daily production work that we do, including over the five days at the Summer School.

The accompanying map paints a landscape that has organically grown over the past five years of the Summer School. While there is no School code or automatic pass that facilitates guaranteed opportunities and resources, what we are witnessing is the growth of a dynamic of relationships and exchanges driven by the artists themselves, together with the additional and complimentary support structures offered by Create and Counterpoints Arts.

The Summer School opens a space for artists to actively partake in an ecosystem of mutual support; and the map paints an intricate infrastructure pointing to the value and impact that diverse models of solidarity can have on forms of social practice for the future.





Field Notes IV

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