

A Reparative Agreement for Artworkers and Institutions

A foreword

Artworkers are workers. This agreement is shared as an invitation to art institutions and our peers across the arts sector to adopt a reparative approach to our shared relationships, working conditions and future. It is written in solidarity with workers across all sectors, recognising that our struggle is shared, and that everyone deserves:

- An end to poverty.
- Universal basic income.
- Reparations.
- Safe housing. To live and thrive.
- Security and care in later life.
- Access to green space and fresh food.

In reading and considering our invitation, we invite Institutions to step into shared values of:

- Generosity.
- Equity.
- Kindness.
- Mindfulness.
- Recognition.

And to uphold these as pillars to the reparative work we demand.

We invite artists and artworkers to share this document with organisations they are working with, to use it as a tool for improving their working conditions, and invite conversations and planning towards achieving these collective goals.

I. Introduction - proposition to repair

This *agreement* is not fixed. Instead, it is a living framework that will evolve over time, conversation and practice. First and foremost, it is a vessel for 'calling in' not 'calling out' **artworkers** or any art **institution** that is introduced to it.

This *agreement* is designed to rebalance the ecology between artworkers and institutions. Like all living documents, it breathes, changes, and responds to the needs of its writers; with the hope this will expand to a larger collective of artists and artworkers. It grows from the shared recognition that the conditions of artistic labour are shaped by unequal power, and that this imbalance isn't inevitable.

Art institutions rely on artists, yet too often exploit our labour, appropriate our ideas, and dictate unfair terms of work. Offering opportunity while withholding stability. If we are to continue paid work with Institutions, we refuse to accept this imbalance. Likewise, we refuse to accept the ethical and practical codes put upon artists as a condition of paid work and not art institutions. We demand that these same standards, and more, apply in reverse. Contracts must be mutual, agreements must be two-way and power must be shared.

This agreement does not seek confrontation but recalibration. It extends an invitation to all who work within cultural systems (artists, curators, producers, directors, administrators; artworkers at large) to reimagine how the work of art, and the work that creates it, might coexist sustainably. From the first conversation to the final outcome, this document offers a means to hold power to account, not through hostility but through clarity. It insists that no institution can exist without artworkers, and no artworker can thrive within structures that disregard their labour. There are no art institutions without artworkers; to profit from our work and labour but deny our needs, beliefs and goals, is not acceptable. We will be recognised as workers with our own methods and processes, professionals whose creative labour deserves structure, respect, and protection.

This agreement therefore proposes a mutual framework: contracts that are not dictates but dialogues, agreements that bind all parties with equity. This is an open text of repair. This is a counter-contract that refuses the fiction of separateness. It invites every reader, every participant in this field, to take part in building a new collective standard and agreement.

II. Artworkers:

To speak as an **artworker** (any individual working within the arts; be it artists, curators, producers, directors, administrators, invigilators, volunteers) is to acknowledge that our practice exists within systems that rarely recognise its complexity. Our roles are often multifaceted, intersectional and at times, contradictory. We do not seek exceptionalism but fairness and fairness cannot be determined solely by the institution.

We expect conversation to be ongoing, reciprocal, and transparent, maintained from the first meeting through to the final outcome. We must speak and be heard, without censorship. Throughout every project, we will maintain open dialogue. We will check in regularly with the team and participants, ensuring that collaboration remains alive, not contractual.

We will be paid fairly, in line with experience, and this fairness will include sick pay, holiday pay, leave, and timely payment. To be compensated equitably and punctually, in ways that acknowledge not only skill and time but the unseen dimensions of care that make creative work possible.

Every element of our practice must uphold the ethics by which it was made. We will receive the time, space, and support necessary for new ideas and curiosity to take form. This includes physical and emotional space, warm environments, food, rest, breaks, and humane conditions for all involved. Art does not emerge from exhaustion. We will have access to therapy and rest days; rest is part of the work. All travel costs will be covered. These are not luxuries; they are the preconditions of ethical collaboration.

We will meet each other as we are; accepting and respecting neurodivergence, tendencies and triggers. Disagreements will be resolved through calling *in*, not calling *out*; through dialogue and repair, not shame or the labour of those affected most. This is a practice of collective care. To work ethically requires more than payment. We ask that institutions show us the thinking that underpins their claims to anti-racism and equality, and that they practise this thinking in the world.

Our work resists narrow frameworks: it is not bound by assumptions, nor by the hierarchies of “market value.” It depends on dialogue, on regular contact and shared reflection, and on an awareness of neurodivergence and difference as part of our collective intelligence.

We believe that the body is the mind, that care deepens thought, and that political expression is a right, not a risk. We understand anti-oppression as practice, not posture, and liberation as collective rather than individual. We work toward abundance rather than scarcity, recognising that participatory work is equal in value to any commodity form. Context, time, and space are relational; energy is finite.

III. The Institution:

Institutions are not monoliths; they are networks of people, shaped by decisions, conditioning, contexts and habits, capable of transformation. We recognise that change within institutions must be enacted from within as much as demanded from without.

It is not enough to speak the language of care while perpetuating the architectures of harm. Within the institution itself, structural inequity must be addressed through action. Racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and transphobia must be eradicated from every level of organisational practice. This cannot be a solely aspirational statement but constantly actionable.

When institutions work with us, they must do so with integrity. If an institution invokes the language of decolonisation, it must also be prepared to speak out against genocide and to make its ethical commitments visible in action. If environmental sustainability is expected of artists, then institutions must fully uphold the same environmental practices themselves. Institutions must also ensure that their funding sources do not perpetuate harm. When they accept money tied to violence, exploitation, or oppression they compromise the integrity of the institution and the work it supports.

They must give full and accurate credit to every participant, recognising the collective labour that sustains any project. They must also acknowledge that all work produced is the intellectual and creative property of the artworker unless a clear purchase agreement is reached. If an institution wishes to alter, reuse, or reframe an artist's work, it must first seek explicit consent, and it must respect an artist's right to refuse. Similarly, no artwork may be used for promotional purposes or linked to other programming without prior, explicit agreement.

IV. Collective Future

This document is an invitation. It calls for a shared reimagining of how we work, live, and make together. Both artworkers and institutions depend on the other, not as employer and employee but as co-authors of a cultural commons.

To meet us here is to accept that exploitation has no place in creativity; that art, if it is to remain meaningful, must be sustained by the same ethics it seeks to imagine in the world. We must rewrite the conditions of our field together. These commitments are not punitive or restrictive; they are generative. To adopt them is to create the conditions in which art can flourish.

Together, let's shape a different **collective experience**; no **Artworker**, no **Institution**. You need us. We will not be exploited. Meet us here, or do not meet us at all.

This agreement was compiled and written by James McColl, in collaboration with; Holly Graham, Giulia Shah, Becky Warnock, Cherelle Sappleton, Ian Giles, Laura Onions, Seyi Adekun and Faye Hamblett-Jones. We came together as the 2023 Constellations° cohort.

It has been created with thanks to Hussein Mitha who led a workshop with the cohort to create an artists' manifesto for institutions, whilst the group were on residency at [Deveron Projects](#) in September 2024.

Constellations is a learning and development programme for artists, curators, producers, commissioners and all those who are active and/or interested in the expanded field of public art. Constellations is curated by [UP Projects](#), the UK's leading public art organisation specialising in socially engaged public art commissioning.