

What is collaboration?

Transcript

Elisabeth Del Prete 0:00

Hi, my name is Elisabeth Del Prete, Curator (Learning and Live Research) at UP Projects. I'm a white woman with long brown hair and I'm wearing a black top, sitting in a white/cream room and I go by the pronouns she/her. We are very excited to welcome so many of you to our *Assembly* event, *What is collaboration?* *Assembly* is a series of four online learning and development events for curator, producers and public art practitioners that explore issues and good practice in relation to the expanded field of public art. The programme invites you, the public art community, to explore the role public art plays in raising awareness and effecting change on issues around diversity, community cohesion and digital realm as a public space. The aim of the programme is to encourage collective knowledge sharing and peer-to-peer learning and across the four events we've put together a fantastic group of socially engaged curators, artists and practitioners who will explore questions around who has agency? What is collaboration? What is the role of curators in socially engaged practice? Is the future of public art online? The speakers at each event will also be invited to contribute a case study and we will be publishing the studies as a downloadable resource on our website. We will also share them via email to everyone who has attended the events, so please do look out for those in a few weeks' time. If you haven't already done so, please do sign up to the last two events in the series taking place in May and June and all of the details can be found on UP Projects' website. *Assembly* has resulted from a collaboration between UP Projects and the Public Art Network and is generously supported by The Art Fund and the Arts Council England. Both organisations recognise that there are very little development opportunities for public art curators and practitioners, particularly those working in the field of social engaged practice. Emphasis is often placed on learning on the job which carries a risk, particularly when working with communities and vulnerable groups. Creating opportunities for knowledge sharing and safe spaces to explore ideas around ethics and best practice or simply to ask questions seems vital as the sector moves forward through and out of COVID. *Assembly* sits with alongside *Constellations*, our learning and development programme for artists who have an interest in socially engage practice and sociopolitical issues. As a public art organisation that is committed to supporting artists to make new work that has social relevance, engages communities and encourages learning, we are really excited to be able to help to shape and to facilitate this programme as well as to support the emerging Public Art Network to further develop a sector specialist network that focusses on professional development as well as external and focusing to make connections to artists, commissioners and the public. Today's event is exploring the subject of

collaboration. How do we create the conditions for something to be co-authored and co-produced? How do we create non-hierarchical relationships? To help us unpick all of this I am delighted to introduce Matteo Lucchetti, our Chair for today's discussion. Matteo is a curator, art historian, and writer. His main curatorial interests are focused on artistic practices that redefine the role of art and the artists in society. Past projects include, Marzia Migliora, *The Spectre of Malthus* presented at MA*GA Art Museum in Italy and Sammy Baloji. *Other Tales* presented at Lunds Konsthall and Kunsthall Aarhus, in Sweden and Denmark, respectively. Matteo has served as the Curator of Exhibitions and Public Programmes at BAK - basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht in 2017-2018. Since 2010, Matteo is curator (together with Judith Wielander) of the Visible Project. So, Matteo will also be joined by two fantastic speakers, Kerry Campbell, Sheffield based independent curator and Samra Mayanja, who is an artist and writer based in Leeds. So, I'm going to hand over to Matteo to introduce the events and the speakers in more details. Thank you.

Matteo Lucchetti 5:02

Thank you, Elisabeth and thank you everyone for being here and thank you to the speakers today. First of all, I would like to say that I'm speaking from Brussels. I'm a white man wearing a dark, grey jacket and I go by the pronouns of he/him. That is for everybody to know to start to get to know each other. I'm really thrilled to chair this panel today. And as Elisabeth has said also in my curatorial practice, this is something of collaboration and what is collaboration? is an ongoing question. As group material, we are thinking what is this for? What we do as an artwork? What is this for? And who is it for? So, the important question of what kind of kinship, what kind of relationships are we establishing while we work? And in my work with the Visible Projects together with Judith Wielander and with a board of over 200 curators in ten years we are really trying to bridge the knowledge that artists produce and to socially engaged art practices towards institutional change and towards the idea that these practices need to be the vision, the imagination through which art institutions will shape themselves and rethink themselves considering the legacy from which they come from that we are all familiar with, I guess. So, but today, I'm very pleased to be the chair for the panel that will share the practices of Kerry and Samra. I'm just going to give a few biography details about both of them to let them kick off then today with their presentations. So, Kerry Campbell is a Sheffield based independent contemporary art curator, consultant and researcher with demonstrable experience developing cultural strategies, programmes, exhibitions and events regionally as well as transforming and diversifying local arts engagement and leading teams with dynamism and sensitivity. Most recently Campbell was the Artistic Director at *Mansions of the Future* which is going to be the topic of your presentation. An expansive three-year Art's Council Ambitions for Excellence funded arts and cultural organisation and international public programme in Lincoln. Samra Mayanja is an artist and writer

based in Leeds whose work spans writing, performance and film. Informed by her background in Economics, Mayanja's work researches, through experiments, modes of collectivising wealth (and debt), as an attempt to address disparity and to explore what it feels like to (mis)trust. Mayanja has exhibited at Signal Film & Media, Barrow-in-Furness and MAMA, Rotterdam, Netherlands. Mayanja has performed at Centre for Live Art Yorkshire, Leeds and Kampnagel, Hamburg, Germany among the other many venues, I'm sure Samra has visited with her work. Just a few details before I let Kerry to start the presentations, I want to let you know, that as Elisabeth and Lili have reminded you, you can write your questions in Slido. And in the *Assembly* moment at the end when we discuss together, we will prioritise for the first ten minutes the questions that we have received through Slido. And then you will also be able to raise your hand for the last five minutes to contribute with more questions. It is important to say that there is also a poll where we've asked this question about "describe with a few words, what are the frustrations that you have experienced in working collaboratively?" Because we believe this could become really an important starting point going from the negative towards the propositions or what it could mean to collaborate differently, starting really from the frustration, from the frictions that you've experienced in collaborating with others. So, without further ado, I will let Kerry start and enjoy the presentations. See you in a bit.

Kerry Campbell 9:23

Hi! Thank you, Matteo. Let me just share my screen...okay super. So, I should describe myself, I'm a white woman, I've got long brown hair. It's straight today. It's usually like almost kind of out of control curly! But I've just kind of neatened myself up for the occasion. I'm sitting on the top floor of my house in Sheffield. And I'm wearing a black top and my pronouns are she/her. Yeah, it's just really brilliant to be here today. I'm an independent curator. I'm based here in Sheffield but I'm from Luton. I'm just really grateful for you all for coming. I have been kind of really soothed by Samra's Grizedale podcast recently, so just a pleasure to be in this company as well. I can't join all the dots today but what I will do, I guess, I will focus on sharing a bit more about the project I've most recently been involved with. Hopefully you can all see that, is that good? Thanks. And then perhaps we can draw out more through the conversation and questions. Just to give you a sense of my work, the kind of trajectory of my curatorial practice I am interested in ideas, in social class, structural inequality, barriers to arts engagement and representation as well as thinking about the civic responsibility. And also, the potential for arts organisations. I like to work regionally, thinking of cultural strategies and public programmes and really trying to think about what is relevant here. It's public money, we have resources, so how can we be accountable and let's think about who we are serving? My work is always context specific. I don't want to begin this presentation suggesting that I know all of the answers, but I want to share some of the ways that I approach projects. And I guess, how I approach them and in the

only way that I know how, which is listening and responding to a particular local context. I hope then that we can have time to touch on the challenges of this approach to work. Most recently, I've been developing projects in Sheffield and Lincoln. And it's the work in Lincoln that I will focus on today. But I kind of cut my teeth working over ten years ago in my home town of Luton, which is, like, my happy place. So, I grew up in Luton, just to give you a bit of background. I grew up in Luton in a relatively poor, single parent household with my brothers and sisters. And at the time, I was thinking about wanting to put on events there was this kind of point where I was living at home and commuting to London long-term for zero-hour contract jobs at the V&A and the Barbican. And I guess, from a young age I was struck by the dichotomy, particularly between the grandeur of the V&A and the context of home, Britain's second largest town, one of the most multicultural places in the UK But there's incredibly high deprivation indicators there, it is blighted by negative sensationalist press. There is a kind of distinct lack of validation for the vibrancy of this community and the kind of, that reality that is come pounded by a lack of community and cultural infrastructure. Just an image of an exhibition at a pub here. So, I set up a curatorial platform in Luton and began to develop exhibitions projects and events under the guise of the initiative of TMT Projects. And, for me it was not just a response to what I didn't just see but felt deeply as omissions of spaces and events that represent and celebrate the complexities and contemporary multicultural of working-class life. The reality is that contemporary art is exclusive by design, and I always try to remind myself of this. Early shows were messy around the edges, they were events, they had to be events. The openings were not called private views, there was always booze or food and you could even get your nails done. They were kind of naive in the development and delivery. Interdisciplinary by nature. And I guess I wanted to celebrate the texture of art activity that was thriving at home. So, they kind of featured musicians, poets, beat makers, painters and dancers. In her book *Emergent Strategy*, Adrienne Maree Brown talks about growing through fusion and not competition. When I looked back at the early shows I was interested in this kind of breakdown of alluded curatorial authority. So, it was the opposite to what I was learning, studying on my MA And I wasn't interested in me being this author of this kind of beautiful, thematically conceptually sound show. I was just interested in all of these people who wanted to be a part of the journey, being a part of that journey, however messy the shows became. This reactive, locally informed, collaborative and interdisciplinary approach has informed my practice ever since. And I guess it feels worth mentioning that, for me, collaboration is not just about me as a curator and the constituents of a place, but it is about the whole team that makes a project possible. And recognising and embracing all of the projects as just a sum of their parts. At home, I fundraise for each project and wanted to frequent the spaces that the community already exist in. So, just to welcome new and diverse audiences. Also, because as I never ever assumed that the event is more important than the complex demands of local family life. So, I delivered exhibitions

and events in pubs, nightclub, youth centres, the shopping malls, offices and the public realm. So, skipping through kind of what feels like many, many moons, it feels most relevant to bring the conversation round to my most recent work in Lincoln. This is a picture of a building in Lincoln, and this is the base of *Mansions of the Future*. So, *Mansions of the Future* was a 3-year project funded by Arts Council's Ambitions for Excellence, And the impotence and vision for this project was devised and launched by the previous co-director's Clare Cumberlidge and Rebecca Blackwood. And it launched in 2018. I was asked to consider taking over as artistic director in 2019. *Mansions of the Future* was an arts and a cultural hub. It was brought to life through a public programme of public art projects, communal lunches, exhibitions, talks, workshops and events. So, it was funded by Ambitions for Excellence, which if you don't know, is, was an incredibly generous Arts Council England fund. It kind of had a focus on towns and cities with limited cultural infrastructure but maybe had a brilliant cultural potential in the eyes of the Arts Council. But what it did mean is that this project was defined by its temporality, so it was funded generously for a fixed term of 3 years. And I wanted to mention this as I had to think really, really, really carefully about that reality when I was kind of asked to consider the job. What does it mean to kind of nurture brilliant provision and to work on something and to deliver all of this activity for a programme and a project and a building that is inevitably coming to an end? How can that time frame be managed and communicated responsibly? And indeed, sensitively? Lincoln is relatively geographically isolated it has quite an aging population. Most people have lived there all of their lives, especially in the city centre and it has high levels of deprivation, and I did say that it was geographically isolated. So, I guess I'm not naïve to what it means to offer significant resource and that not be something that is long-term. So, when I took on the job, I worked on writing a legacy agenda into the programme. So, we were thinking about that from the offset, and we were kind of thinking about that with the communities from the offset. How will this be communicated sensitively and transparently and how will all of the learning be preserved, and the resources be redistributed? And I hope I can expand on that legacy agenda more in the conversation. But just to give you a sense of the space, here are images from the inside of the building. So, the building layout was designed and delivered by an artist called Kathrin Böhm's as part of her inaugural commission, so she thought about how best the space could be best designed for public use and how it could serve a public. It was quite kind of domestic in character. Everybody had to use this kind of twisted ramp to get in, so you entered the space whether you were able-bodied or not. There was a larder, a big communal kitchen, a big kind of living room, a library, some studios, some office spaces and some carpet spaces for theatre and performance. So, a really kind of beautifully designed multiuse space, all of the furniture collaboratively built prior to the opening. So just kind of stocked to the rafters with resource and a really inspiring space. Kathrin laid the foundations for the architecture of the public programme. And there was two core strands of activities. So, there was a curated

public programme and there was something called a "take over programme". So, the curated public programme unfolded in seasons, and just to expand on approach I wanted to refine the public programme, so it was always 3 things. It was social, site-specific and collaborative. And we supported artists both locally and regionally to respond to the context, talking to local people engaging in the history and the heritage of Lincoln. So, before any artist's commissions were worked up, any artists who weren't local had to spend time in the city engaging with the city's geography, its heritage and its community and businesses. I think it's a common programming misconception, that the only way to put places with a limited culture infrastructure on the map is by parachuting in valid culture. So, the spirit was to ensure that everything came from a local reality, the local spirit. In my work, I always liked to encourage teams to think critically about who we are serving, who we're representing and how can you ensure that the work is responding to a place and to its citizens? I'm kind of conscious of the time. So, I'll kind of speed up. So, I mentioned that there were two strands to the cultural output. One was the curated public programme; one was the takeover programme. And the takeover programme was also a gesture in Kathrin Böhm's vision for the space. And it invited anyone to make use of the space for free for social, cultural or educational activity. And at this peak, the takeover programme was welcoming like 70 regular community groups from the YMCA to Disability Theatre to sufferer groups to groups of women's wellness, adult bereavement, punk poets, the list kind of goes on. So, it operated at this, pretty exhausting but absolutely beautiful inception, between like a community centre and an art gallery, I guess. And I guess it's just about democratising resources in a landscape stripped of all investment in community spaces and place, is there anything more important than sharing what you have? So, when we look at the cultural output of the project, it's inclusive of the two parts, the free public programme and the takeover programme. So, the offer was wide reaching, interdisciplinary, it wasn't authored just by us, and it was again, messy around the edges. We had regular communal lunches.

Matteo Lucchetti 23:38

Can you wrap up, I am so sorry...

Kerry Campbell 23:41

It's absolutely fine. I'll just share a couple of images...

Matteo Lucchetti 23:46

I don't want to interrupt you...

Kerry Campbell 23:47

It's okay, it's my problem. I don't think I could not see the chat function in the screen. So, here's some images of the regular communal lunches and some the activities and the different seasons and the work on and off the site. I'll leave it

there and I can mention that book in the chat. Thank you, Matteo. Samra, I will hand over to you.

Samra Mayanja 24:28

Cool. Hello, I'm Samra Mayanja. My pronouns are she/her. I'm in what was a sunlit brick room. I'm a Black woman with dark brown skins with undertones of red like the soil of Uganda. My hair is black, in a short and tightly coiled afro. What the coral said...breathe...breathe...breathe...sing...let that water move within you...let it be you...let your every cilia dance you into healing...let the warm saltwater brighten you, your tears...sleep, and you dream of working...sleep again...sleep until you dream of floating...dream until your edge is soft...dream until you birth yourself in water, singing with the bones of all your loss...dream until you breathe...not through your mouth, not through your nose...but through your hair and through your skin...dream until you claim the ocean...breathe until you feel no need to swim...breathe until your dreams flow out of your brain...breathe and let them in your heart...breathe...we kill call you again...that's a start. So, that is a short text by Alexis Pauline Gunn from a collection called *Dub: Finding Ceremony*. I may or may not touch on that again, but I just like it as a type of grounding text. At the centre of this talk is a particular work that I made in early 2020 called *Aims of Art*. The work itself wasn't my finest hour because I was not able to create the kind of art object that would create a dialogue between the viewer, that is now or in the future and the process that had led to this art object being made. It could not do it in the way that I imagined. Despite this, the process and the work felt like the start of a radical shift in my thinking around the relationship between the artist, the collaborators, the art object that is made, in parallel or symbiosis with the collaborative process, the institution that commissions the socially engaged art project and the viewer but all of these I have listed before, are also viewers, in a sense. *Aims of Art* and the letter that forms the narration for the video were exhibited at Blackwell Arts and Crafts House in early 2020 in a show called *The Arts and Crafts of Politics*. The title of the work is borrowed from a William Morris text by the same name that explores the connections between labour and pleasure and condemns a society that accepts horrific work conditions as normality. The video work was the result of meeting with various staff, volunteers and a Board member at Blackwell Arts and Crafts House and hosting several mini workshops with people where we tried to imagine an object that the staff could and wanted to use and one that they felt that all staff, volunteers and Board Members could benefit from. They opted for something that would encourage breaks and rest. The workshops were iterative and generative. Sometimes with entire departments, then I'd take their sketches and ideas to a singular volunteer or Board member, then on to another team and so on. I was initially commissioned to make a work in collaboration with an entirely different community group pre-defined by the organisation. My community group dropped out last-minute, so I decided to work with the staff. During site visits, many members of staff made it known that the

organisation was experiencing turbulence of some kind and that their jobs were not feeling secure. Communication was sour, people were fearful of whether they would be made redundant or not, and some people had already been made redundant. I mean, similar things happened at, you know, large organisations like the Tate and South Bank, not to mention smaller arts organisations too. And it felt to me like this organisation in particular wasn't able to hold the contradiction of the precarity, stress, and the insecurity in the workplace, whilst presenting a show exploring the socialist-political ideas of the Arts and Crafts Movement. So, this is the point of departure for the rethinking of *Aims of Art*. The contradiction between doing socially engaged work with communities outside of arts organisations as a kind of political gesture and the lack of extending the principles or bringing those principles back and perspectives into the running of the arts organisation. What then is the purpose of the projects if not to shift how we all do things everywhere? And not just those that we believe to be sad, destitute, deserving people outside of the institution? The work is for us ALL. It's an imaginative and realised experiment in how it could be. So, it shouldn't exist solely in the orchestrated confines of a project but throughout the organisation, at home, in the street, and so on. And this is what we can define as a pre-configurative politic, imagining an enacted world other than here. I've had this diagram, the artist Suzanne Lacy made. And the diagram is of the audience. I had imagined what this diagram meant before I had studied it. But then when I arrived at this place of studying the notion of the layers of the audience, I felt I could use this for the talk, and use it in the sense to reflect on the audience and the relationship to a socially engaged process, which is often mediated through a parallel work like my film, *Aims of Art*. The film is a letter that I wrote to the staff, letting them know that I would be giving them my entire materials budget and also detailing the reasons why. This video and any subsequent reflection on the project, like this talk for example, is the only way that those outside of the original process can access the knowledge and the work because you are dislocated from the experience to the project by time, location or closeness. Suzanne Lacy's diagram, featuring in a text she entitled *Mapping the Terrain* enables me to understand the audience in relation to what this book termed as public art. The diagram is a series of concentric, non-hierarchical circles. A circle in the centre and those larger circles around. And in order, these circles go origination and responsibility at the centre, collaboration and co-development, meaning those who are partaking in the project, volunteers and performance, this next layer, the immediate audience, the media that engage with the work and the audience of myth and memory, those who exist beyond that. And slight side note, the text I read 'Dub' earlier, is somehow representative also of five other textures or layers that are in this talk but not on the surface. And the way that I want to kind of bring them to you is through a very long question or maybe not such a long question: Do the words invitation, tension, trust, disparity and conclusion mean anything to you? At the centre of *Aims of Art* is the process of making the work, it's the conversations, the workshops, sketches, questions, and questions back and

forth and back. But I have a sense that there's something missing, something that needs to be added to Suzanne Lacy's diagram. The diagram itself isn't quite it. But maybe I'll have time to come back to that. What I was hoping to do was to create an art object to mediate a conversation between the viewer and the process I had undertaken with the staff. I wanted an object that could or would be a conversation between the viewers now and in the future and that the process could talk through / as an object and that the viewer would have space to respond. This object that is seen and experienced is part of the way in which those outside of the process are able to fall into it, to learn from it, to lean into it, and receive support from it when they need to. I mean, that's why as a teenager, I would find my way to an art gallery, despite the fact that no-one I knew had ever been to them. Okay, I've got one minute left. I'm going to jump down. So, ultimately, I think what I am trying to say with these fragments is that this work, this work of socially engaged work, this work of collaboration, and the knowledge that it makes, the languages that it swims between and the conversations that it mediates could be used and implemented to realise the kinds of experiments in organisational structures, specifically arts organisations, that can move us away from where we are now to somewhere other than here. Rather than exhibitions as static displays, *Aims of Art* allowed me towards using the multiple perspectives in and around a work of art, that centred around a process. Projects that are actively imagining and enacting a rupture and they offer of space for further rupture and ripple and rupture again in the organisation that's commissioned them. It seems strange to me that arts organisations aren't using the knowledge that they are commissioning artists to put on their walls, to enact in communities, and to bring back into their spaces. The *Aims of Art* and my experience and my critique and understanding of the project, *Aims of Art*, in context of Blackwell is what has kind of brought me to this place, as well as like Kerry, working in arts organisations as invigilators, as cleaners, in various positions. So, I'm going to conclude there. And I think that the rest of what I had to say will come in the questions. Thank you for listening.

Matteo Lucchetti 35:30

Yes, I agree with Kerry, and the applause is not just for Samra it's for both of you, I think that you both beautifully brought a lot of content to the table that is urgent to take this opportunity to really discuss now and between the three of us and then opening it up to everybody that is here, that is already answering questions and who already responding to the poll. I thank you both because you both pointed out some of the things that I also struggle with, for some time, for some years. Starting from Kerry's point, which is important to say, contemporary is exclusive by nature, by design, sorry, this is what you said. In the sense that we all have confronted, especially also coming from a, not those exclusive circles but I guess this is an experience that many share. To really like, how can we, you know, belong to this space but at the same time not lose contact with the issues of province that we are actually interested in? And I think these two presentations show the two different

sides. On one hand, how can this be done in an organisational sense, you know what Kerry has done with *Mansions of the Future* and what Samra has done by being invited by an institution and starting a question, a methodology that allowed, really, to think about the major questions that are at stake and at the same time also to be positive in the practice of saying: Can we create the ruptures through which new configurations can be imagined? As this is urgent as we can't play this game anymore, we cannot be part of programmes that talk about urgent issues, that talk about the communities that they want to collaborate with, and then next show is another thing and everything goes back to "normal" so in the moment like this, where also we had the rupture of the pandemic, and maybe we simply don't want to go back to the normal that we all know was not normal for many of us. So, I go to the questions. I just wanted to wrap up as I think that from these two beautiful perspectives there was so much that was already brought up. So, maybe just to allow us or you to discuss, to argue on expanding on what was a short presentation that didn't allow you to say. So, first to Kerry, I wanted you to expand a bit if you can on the takeover programme and also, the urban form, social architecture and the commons programme. Because I think there really lies not only the idea of making space for new kinds of formulations and what an institution can do but also how can the spaces that are opening up can change the way that the institution is? And this goes back maybe to the idea of involving Kathrin Böhm from the very beginning of your directions? This is my question for you, and then I will also have one for Samra and then maybe we can start the conversation.

Kerry Campbell 38:42

Yeah, sure thanks Matteo. The takeover programme was just intrinsic, I think, to the value and the vibrancies of *Mansions of the Future*. The success of it, is also difficult to process and it was at the time. What it means, is it speaks of a desperation and a real kind of community need for fully accessible, free spaces that the community can use for their own activities. I'm kind of conscious of using the word "community" as referring to a homogeneous mass, but the people who lived in Lincoln, the take up of this space and just the amount of groups who wanted to use it for free, for social, cultural, educational activity and the vibrancy of the activities that were kind of taking place there, definitely spoke of a city-wide need for community and social spaces. Yeah, I mean, it is the same all over the UK with the slashes to public funding, public resources and community centres and youth centres. So, it was beautiful to kind of fill that space. But, you know, it speaks of a wider problem. One of the seasons of activity that you referred to there was called "urban form, social architecture and the Commons" And we wanted to engage the citizens of Lincoln in the conversation around the past, present and future of the built environment. And also, I wanted the team to think critically about who has the privilege to access the city centre space? We had all of these great resources; sure, it was fully accessible, but Lincolnshire is a huge county. So, for that season it was about four months, we kind of took a lot of our resources,

programming team, and delivered it off site on the Ermine Estate, which is a really isolated in Lincoln, it's just north of the city centre It's about 10,000 homes. There's no community centres. All of their pubs have been closing year on year, so we kind of took up space in a church. We just spent a lot of time getting to know the architectural history, geography and kind of contemporary reality of that area. My colleague, Beth, lives there, which is helpful, which is really important. I spent a lot of time going to community action groups with my staff, learning about the stresses of the hedges being too big, and like, the noisy dogs on the estate. And just trying to think about what are they already doing that we could add resource to and kind of contribute to what was going on? And we invited some urban designers to come over from Berlin and they spent a lot of time getting to know the community, researching, spending time with the archives and then went away with kind of all that knowledge and came back with a big part participatory project. Yeah, and just had a really humbling time meeting a lot of people and thinking about how to contribute in a reactive way.

Matteo Lucchetti 42:21

Thank you, Kerry. I have another question but would like to ask something to Samra, if I can. Because you describe the *Aims of Art* as the project which started as a commission from the Blackwell institution. And then it turned into like a larger reflection where you really wanted to collaborate with first the community group and then with the staff and then it became a learning experience, no? On the contradiction, on the friction? I wanted to ask you as this was like you were responding to an institution and then going in that direction. How did this teach you or like became an experience that brought you to create your own projects? Your own ongoing research, on the same topics but starting from your own agency, let's say, not the other way around, not the institution asking you and you responding but rather like because I know that some projects that you mentioned, that also started afterwards, or are still ongoing that maybe can shed light on the methodology and the practice, more starting from your own agency, rather than the response?

Samra Mayanja 43:39

Yeah, I think...I tried to, after that project, I tried to kind of take a moment of reflection that then led to me speaking to different arts organisations, because I wanted to have a fuller understanding of the structure of an arts organisation, how can I position...I've been a volunteer, I have worked. I have worked in different positions, how can I position myself, so I have a different kind of, maybe, empathy or understanding, to what is going on inside the organisation? Which, I suppose, that part of the talk that I didn't quite get to is introducing a kind of maybe abolitionist practice, one that says, you know, we can be understanding, that organisations aren't faceless, there are people who work in these spaces who have whole live, whole histories and pasts, and I wanted to kind of, I suppose, put myself

in different spaces so that I could try to understand it from a different perspective. But then I also feel like underpinning a lot of my work, I suppose, is, and what underpins this like member mechanism or twist around the contradiction is that ultimately the contradiction enables a disparity between different people inside of the organisation. If there are certain people who are with art works, who have access to artists access to the ideas but then don't spread it out through the institution, don't give space for reflection, they are the only ones that are privy to that, or the community groups who are outside of the institution, are the only ones deserving of care and attention and a meticulousness in how they are treated but not the staff members who are perhaps volunteers or the staff members who are in lower paid roles. So, yes, that's kind of like one area of thinking that is really grounded in the institution. And another part is, and the thread is the disparity that links to, okay, well, what are the layers of disparity that I am aware of in my life that comes from my experience, my family and one such way I have tried to experiment lough is through collectivising wealth in a familial context with my family in England and Uganda, where there is a level of disparity amongst ourselves, you know, amongst those live in England and live different place who have different jobs and lives but also our family in Uganda who have a drastically different experience to that of which we have here. Most, pronounced in the sense that there is no social security, there is no, I mean, it is abysmal here and dwindling, but there is nothing there So, it's like how can we collectivise wealth in order to create a safety net for each other, that I can access but also others can access it. And then that thinking around disparity, okay, what, where else does that exist, Samra? Where else can I try to borrow from those principles? And I suppose I started to think about that again around time that the Arts Council announced the Emergency Funding for Artists. You know, I work in a duo with my best friend, Samuel Lanchin. And I was eligible for the funding, but he wasn't, and we've worked together the same amount of time. And we were pretty much in the same position financially at that point. So, we have been talking about, well what to do that seems deeply unjust? How do we address this? What about other people who are able to get the funding and those who aren't? And then we had seen this call for solidarity syndicates to form. Which are basically groups of artists made up of those who eligible for the fund and those who weren't, to pull together, you know, resources as in apply, to put in the energy to apply and maybe only 3 people out of 6 would be eligible and actually apply but the money can be distributed amongst a larger group of people. And in that group, we have been together for about a year, and it's been a space, Similarly, to this group, with my family, of talking about life and also being able to distribute money to, towards people paying rent, towards things relating to people's practices, towards language courses but also have critical conversations about money, specifically, consciousness-raising questions around our relationship to money and wealth and debt and privilege.

Matteo Lucchetti 48:49

It really goes in the direction of what you were saying before. About experimenting on how it could be. So really to take the practices as a way to really experiment on how it can be. Since we have to experiment on how it could be speak to more than 3 people, we will open up. I start by saying that in the poll that we launched, almost 100 people replied with one or more words and it's interesting because the biggest one, it is really a word cloud and the biggest one is misunderstandings. And I think it really resounds to what we are speaking about. Because of course, it's about you know different layers of disparity, therefore different entry points to the same things, for having different languages and speaking about similar thing, different agencies at play and also sometimes looking at the words, unequal work, unequal power dynamics and time constraints. Because loss of time is a fundamental aspect of it because without the right amount of time things cannot change and cannot be implemented. And to think of the questions through the notes of Samra and also like sometimes, when institutions work with refugees or asylum seekers but how do they really change their status if these people then for instance cannot be paid legally? So, this is interesting, I think of projects like Ève Chabanon that is an interesting French artist that started the idea of collaborating with asylum seekers and refugees only if the art institutions would then do the legal paperwork to make contracts to them and therefore helping them in the process of getting the papers. And then she collaborates with artisans, with people that have specific skills and Also, it's a collaboration where she improves knowledge of artistic skills they can then open up practices to other possible users of it and then at the same time the institution becomes, is used as a way to also have an effect on the life of these people, for instance, just an example. But also, if you think of the work of Cooking Sections in the Isle of Skye, remaining in the UK, it's also interesting to see how they committed for full-time, ongoing since 2015, they are there, they are really trying to fight salmon farming and at the same time they are trying to do this by involving all the restaurants, the schools, people and all of them are in different stakes, have different stakes in this thing of course it but all of them, through the years they really changed the way in which they operate and this started from an art institution that now has this project as an ongoing one. So, there are examples out there and I think it's really important to really do as much as possible to experiment on how it can be and the example of Kerry you know working with the takeover project in different forms and with the examples of Samra just explained with sharing even a grant, in a way they can help more people or to have ongoing with relationships with their best friend to really shape things different in their practice, is a really wonderful example. So, I'm going to start to open for questions. We have 12 questions but because we have in Slido the possibility to vote for questions, I'm going to start with the most voted question - at least more people have shared their urge to ask it. So, there is this first question from anonymous that says: Kerry, please can you say more about the legacy of your project. I think that one of your slides showed a publication, and who did you share it with and

why? I'm also going to read another two, so that with have a few questions to work with. Then the second one is: What are some of your tips for ensuring local authenticity in the process and outwards? And for Samra: Where can I find info on *Aims of Art*? Which is very useful, but you know that can be quickly answered but maybe you can also unfold on the ramifications of the project.

Kerry Campbell 52:57

Yeah, sure I will answer quickly. So, the legacy agenda there were a kind of few aspects of it, one was the equitable redistribution of all of our assets from our resources to our sewing machines, materials, collaboratively built furniture, all of the books. The desks, shelves, everything at that was a part of the project, kitchen units was kind of freely distributed to local initiatives who were charities or doing social work or Black-led community organisations or cultural organisations. So, all of that, I guess it was just making sure everything that was a part of that project, I don't know, wasn't sold or ended up elsewhere, but just made sure it was thoughtfully redistributed. Another aspect of it was a lot of advocacy and lobbying, before we left to cultural, well cultural organisations, but maybe people who had some power and voice in the city to articulate the value of free community space, successful space to communicate just how much local people needed it. So, there was a lot of that. And there is a publication which just came out earlier this year, published by Chatto International. Which really is a sum of its parts, just like the project and there's contributions there from architects, and volunteers and designers and artists, staff. Just everyone kind of involved with the project. And it reflects on the themes of power, democracy, co-authorship and community practices. That's called: *Mansions of the Future: A Public Programme*. Finally, there's a big conference, it was meant to be more of a kind of celebratory event back in Lincoln. It's now online and it's called the Innovation in Engagement Conference. And it's an opportunity for us to capture and to communicate the project's learning but also to promote cross-organisational learning across the charity sector, policy maker and also community and social sector recognising that often the best demonstrations of this work are outside of the arts and the cultural sector, and trying to kind of promote conversations around new economies, the sustainability of the work and across organisational learning, you can find info about that on the *Mansions of the Future* website. Which is a bit of an archive now.

Matteo Lucchetti 55:37

Before I let Samra answer, I wanted to also ask you again, what would be a tip in terms of what may come from your practice? Also, something for Samra and then also for Samra, I'm trying to also get more questions because there are so many. So, we can expand as much as possible. And for Samra, what would be the best possible legacy/outcome from the Blackwell project? So, this is also maybe good for Samra to note while maybe Kerry can try to share a tip on what did you learn, that maybe you would or wouldn't do again?

Kerry Campbell 56:14

These are nice questions, I'm kind of grateful for the poll thing as well. I don't know, just listen. I think if you've got an idea immediately, just don't do that idea, just stop and wait and listen to really what's going on and what's useful in that space.

Matteo Lucchetti 56:33

Thank you. Samra?

Samra Mayanja 56:36

I can answer the question about where people can find information about the project. After this I will make public probably on my blog, the...I don't know how to call that, the primary notes which Matteo has had access to. And which kind of ground the talk that you heard today and the bits that you didn't hear. I can share those with a link to the video with the password for all the people that are here today and if you want to pass it on, you can pass it on, I'm not so precious! So, that's to answer that question. And I think, *Assembly* have made my blog, like, known to people. You can check that out in the next week or so. Then the next one, is the best outcome for Blackwell, from the Blackwell programme? I really think, I'm just going to real off things I would like to see a lot of things, I would love to see a programme of critique as a practice. And not just for the directors or the institution or the curators but for everybody that wants to be there. That there is a programme of critique, that comes from the knowledge and the work that has been in the proceeding show or the proceeding project or the proceeding process. I would love to see networks of organisations holding each other to account on these kinds of processes and practices. But also, networks of organisations that can cushion each other and hold each other and share resources so that this is possible. Because I understand that sometimes there is a pressure on people. I hope that when we are talking about the effects of the pandemic, we are also recognising deaf and grief and loss and that organisations that are implementing some kind of like robust resources for people that are, have experienced loss in the past year or grief or just the overwhelming sense of loss and leaving. I would personally really like to try this experiment again in another space. Maybe it doesn't have to be an arts organisation. So, I think that, again, it is the kind of legacy for it. And improve the quality of the object that mediates or mediates is a conversation between the viewer and the process. which is like the video that you see or this talk. So, yeah, those are the things that I would like to happen.

Matteo Lucchetti 59:31

And maybe a tip from your experience, from your practice?

Samra Mayanja 59:35

A tip, concerning with what, in particular? A tip for what?

Matteo Lucchetti 59:39

The question was related to, now let me go back to it...A tip for ensuring local authenticity in the process and outputs. So, in the relationship with the local scene and with the communities surrounding, what would be a tip from your experience for instance for the *Aims of Art* or other projects?

Samra Mayanja 1:00:05

Account for more time than you think it will take!

Matteo Lucchetti 1:00:10

That's very useful!

Samra Mayanja 1:00:13

Always, a lot more! And that's very obvious but I think because conversations, honest conversations take a long time. They take much longer. And even if they don't take a long time, there's the time at home where you then, or the time at home when you rest and you have to rebuild something. So, yes.

Matteo Lucchetti 1:00:34

Okay, we still have another 5 minutes or so. I can use a couple of questions from the Q&A or the possibility for you to raise your hand and we will let you ask the question directly. So, this is a possibility. But in the meanwhile, so that we don't waste time, there is a question for Kerry: Were there things, objects, forms of materiality that aided the collaboration with the local community? It is a very practical question, again.

Kerry Campbell 1:00:10

I would say that the thing, really, it is just that building. It was not so much, always me facilitating collaboration with the team, the building that very much did it itself, you know. So, a lot of people would come into the space because their local yoga group was doing yoga there, or because their mate was doing a little reading class in the reading room. And the beauty of that, you can use the space for free, gesture, just meant because people entered the space on the terms that they felt comfortable with, they would see kind of posters for some of the curated public programme talks or communal lunches which made the offer at the building more universal. Because they already had ownership over that space, I guess. So that was quite a mutually beneficial arrangement between the takeover programme and the public programme. So, I think that the main aspect of materiality was that inspiring space.

Matteo Lucchetti 1:02:30

Great. So, maybe since we don't have hands there. I maybe have a last question for all of us, that goes back to the poll about the frustrations. So, not to talk more

about frustration, but what could be and since misunderstandings is the word that has been summed up with the general feeling, I think it would be interesting maybe in a few words from all of us to close the session to say what could be a way to circumvent, to explore ways not to end up in a misunderstanding and what would be a good approach to like unravel the misunderstandings and experiment with other formats instead, that can be more inclusive and therefore where there is less space for misunderstanding? I don't know if Samra wants to answer or Kerry?

Samra Mayanja 1:03:27

Yeah, I can...I feel the question how to circumvent, I feel like misunderstandings will pretty much always occur, I think. Or like slippages, you know? Or like missed translations or misinterpretations of what someone said or their intention. But I also think that things also happen maybe on a subvocal level. That it could be someone's tone, or how they move or like the space that you are in that feels, that creates an agitation or a tension. So, I think it's more about what do we have in place when those things happen? What is in place to address that? And I think that it is somewhat maybe different for like whoever is involved in the project. That like the layers to cushion, say, the artist feeling misunderstood or misrepresented could be the layers of family, the layers of the specific role in the organisation, or just could be a friend or could be a book or could be a song. And the layers of cushioning, maybe it's something to introduce into projects, even, from the beginning. That there may be misunderstanding, what are your systems or processes that you then use to come back from that? But I also think, like trying to create an environment for people where...like let's try again. Like the misunderstanding happened, let's try again, and I'm here for, and I'm empathising and I'm with you. So, yeah, something around that.

Kerry Campbell 1:05:16

I agree with everything Samra said. And just from a public programming perspective, I would say too, hold space and resources for that reactivity. So, it's like if you have this very fixed vision of what you want it to be, but you've invited participation along the way, then...I don't know, it is a difficult position to be in. I think if you are welcoming the journey being a part of the outcome and ideas and people's vision for what they think it should be, if you hold space for that reactivity. I think it's quite helpful.

Matteo Lucchetti 1:05:53

And I can say that I agree with both of you. And also, that I want to add as a last thought, that I think, you know, this idea of misunderstanding as a frustration, it's interesting because as also Samra was pointing out, it can become the starting point of something else. It can really become, that maybe it is good to feel the misunderstanding because it forces us to find a new language, find new vocabulary for things to also remove ourselves from the exclusivity that contemporary art and

times also taught us. And find new words and vocabulary that can really allow more people to join and to feel that they belong to that place, they can appropriate that place as well because they feel it's also theirs. And I think, you know, in the sense of also creating unexpected kinships between people, agents, communities that were maybe previously unrelated but thanks to the knowledge that art can produce, we can also shape different constituencies, different ideas of collaborations. Thank you so much to Samra and Kerry for really sharing so generously, and thank you to Elisabeth, to whom I give back the word to the floor.

Kerry Campbell 1:07:14

Thank you, Matteo.

Samra Mayanja 1:07:16

Thank you, Matteo also. And thanks Kerry!

Elisabeth Del Prete 1:07:20

Thank you so much, Matteo, Kerry and Samra. This was a really important conversation around the ethics of collaboration and social practice. I personally found it particularly insightful to hear your comments about how to work through the misunderstandings or how institutions can and should make genuine impact on the communities they engage with, whether they're members of the public or volunteers or partner organisations or members of the staff. I thought this was a really dense, an important conversation. Thank you also to our audience for participating and for the comments and the questions that you shared in the chat. Please do share further feedback you may have with us. In fact, you will see on the Slido bar questionnaire on the right, there is a survey which we would be really grateful if you can complete before you leave. We also hope to see you at the next *Assembly* event, *Are curators still relevant?* which will reflect on how the role of curators has evolved in the past years and will continue changing in the future. The event will be chaired by Jes Fernie, independent curator, writer and also a member of the Public Art Network. We will be announcing the full line-up of speakers via social media in a couple of weeks' time. So do sign up to Instagram or Twitter if you haven't already. And as I said at the beginning, we will be sharing case studies about two of the projects that Kerry and Samra talked about today. We will also upload a recording of today's event on YouTube, which will also include captions and a BSL interpreter. So please do look out for these resources in a couple of weeks' time. We will send an email out to all attendees. And also, do please remember to sign up to our UP Projects' mailing list to find out more about *Assembly's* future programmes. And finally, another huge thank you to our amazing speakers, to The Art Fund and Arts Council England for supporting this programme, to the Public Art Network for inviting us to collaborate with them and particularly to Jes Fernie, Theresa Bergne and Emma Underhill for putting together such a fantastic programme. Lastly, I wanted to thank the fantastic team



of UP Projects who have really hard to make the event possible today. So, thank you all very much. And I look forward to seeing you at the next event.