

Who has agency, whose voices are heard? Transcript

Emma Underhill 0:01

Welcome everybody to our first *Assembly* event *Who has agency and whose voices are heard?* It's fantastic to see so many of you here there's over 200 people in the room. So, thank you so much for coming. *Assembly* is a series of four online learning and development events for curators, 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 can play in raising awareness and effecting change on issues around diversity, community cohesion, and the digital realm as a public space. Its aim 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 and is the future of public art online. If you haven't already done so, please do sign up for the other events in the series that will be taking place monthly across April, May and June. All details can be found on UP Projects' website. And the speakers at each event will also be invited to contribute a case study. And we'll be publishing the case studies as a downloadable resource on our website. And we'll also share them by email to everyone who's attended the event. So do look out for those in a few weeks' time. This programme has come about through a collaboration between UP Projects and the Public Art Network, and it's generously supported by the Art Fund, and I'm really delighted that this partnership has come to fruition. Both organisations have identified that there are very little opportunities for public art curators and practitioners, particularly those working in the field of socially engaged practice. So often were thrown in at the deep end and expected to learn on the job performing the many different roles required to develop and deliver this complex work with very little support or guidance. Creating opportunities for knowledge sharing and safe spaces to explore ideas around ethics and best practice, or simply just to ask questions seems vital as the sector moves forward, through and out of COVID in order to continue to positively contribute to the communities and the public contexts that we operate in. For UP Projects, *Assembly* is a fantastic addition to our programme, sitting alongside *Constellations* our Learning and Development Programme for artists who have an interest in community-oriented practice. As a public art organisation that's committed to supporting artists to meet new work that has social relevance, engages communities and encourages learning, we're really excited to be able to help shape and facilitate this programme, as well as support the emerging Public Art Network

to further develop as a sector specialist network that focuses on professional development as well as external advocacy, making connections to artists, commissioners and the public. So, today's event is exploring who has agency and whose voices are heard? Diversity, access and inclusion have become buzzwords in the field of public art, but it remains stubbornly undiverse and alien to many. And how can we change this to ensure that the work we produce is inclusive and relevant to a diverse public? To help us unpick all of this I'm delighted to introduce Amanprit Sandhu, our chair for today's discussion. Amanprit is a curator and educator with a focus on commissioning performance-based practices and collaborative approaches to working. Her current work includes organising the inaugural biannual programme for the borough of Brent in London and co-curating the 2021 Borås Art Biennale in Sweden. She was the co-founder of the curatorial collective DAM Projects, and has worked as curator at Wysing Art Centre, Art on the Underground and Camden Art Centre. She is a curatorial practice tutor at the Curating Contemporary Art MA at the Royal College of Art and visiting lecturer at Chelsea College of Art. So, we are in very safe hands here. Amanprit will also be joined by two fantastic speakers. Linda Rocco, London based curator and Roseanna Dias who's a curator based in Bristol. So, without further ado, I'm really delighted to hand over to Amanprit to introduce the speakers in more detail. Thank you.

Amanprit Sandhu 4:31

Thanks so much, Emma. That was a lovely introduction and a big hello to everyone. It was really nice seeing everyone introduce themselves. So, I've just made a note here. We've got people here from Hastings, Glasgow, Newcastle, Kraków, Madrid, and also Toronto. So that's really exciting to just know that there's a big sort of audience who want to have these conversations. So, I'm just going to talk a bit about the format of today and then introduce our speakers Linda Rocco, and Roseanna Dias. So, Linda and Roseanna will be talking for 10 minutes each, I'm going to introduce them through their bios, and there'll be no break. So, Linda will talk for 10 minutes, that will be followed by Roseanna presenting a short film, *Under My Skin* and Roseanna will then go into her 10-minute presentation. And that will then be followed by a conversation, which will be approximately half an hour. And it is important that you feel like you can contribute to the conversation in a very live way. So, there's a prompt that you've seen already. So, we've had the question "In one word, what does diversity mean to you?" And it's great to see sort of the responses we've got back already. So, inclusivity, inclusion, everyone, equity are the ones that are yeah, kind of sort of shouting out to me, but there will be another prompt. So please do keep, as kind of ideas or thoughts come to your mind do add to the Q&A. And I can then feel those questions to Linda and Roseanna. And now more to the kind of formal part of what I need to introduce. So, it is the first event and the idea behind this event was to explore issues and raise questions about diversity, acknowledging the idea that the lack of diversity among audiences

and within artistic leadership are two interlinked issues. So, the presentation by our two speakers will illustrate how two different projects have addressed the need to diversify audiences and the speakers won't be merely describing the projects but will rather describe the issues at stake. And then, to introduce Linda and her work, Linda Rocco is a London based contemporary art curator and a PhD candidate at the Royal College of Art funded by the AHRC. She's a creative consultant for liberty at the Greater London Authority (the GLA) and has curated public events and exhibitions internationally with established small-scale institutions as Delfina Foundation to warehouse spaces such as Yinka Shonibare's Studio Guest Projects, including the curation of the public sphere for Nine Elms on the Southbank. Linda also co-directs the not-for-profit organisation *Inventory Platform*, which engages communities in urban and rural contexts through socially engaged art projects since 2016. She also co directs the disability Arts Festival and engagement programme, *I'm Here, Where Are You?* produced with Cambridge Junction. Linda regularly works as a curator for artists and private galleries as well as consulting for charities, foundations and public institutions on accessible and socially engaged arts collaboration with STEM subjects as well as participatory and intermediate practices. And recent collaborations include the Goethe Institute London, Danish Arts Foundation, Ministry of Culture Taiwan, Pineapple Lab Philippines, Frieze Art Fair London, and the Laure Genillard Gallery London to name a few. Welcome, Linda. And I'm also going to introduce Roseanna at this point as well. Roseanna Dias is a Bristol based producer, curator and facilitator interested in creativity and social change. Her focus is on supporting young creatives in particular through film media, and digital projects. Her work draws on co creation, action research and approaches which centre care. And today she's going to speak about her work at Rising Arts Agency, which is a large youth led creative agency supporting artists aged 18 to 30, where she is currently executive producer for *Be It*, a radical leadership programme and critical researcher for resourcing racial justice. And at this point, I'd like to hand over to Linda.

Linda Rocco 9:10

Thank you, Amanprit thank you so much. I hope you can hear me and see me. So, my name is Linda Rocco, pronouns she/her and I'm a white woman with a bright yellow jacket and some long hair. So, I'm here to present *Where I'm Coming From*. *Where I'm Coming From* was a month-long digital programme commissioned by the Yinka Shonibare Foundation, in partnership with multiple stakeholders, which you can see on this slide. And the programme was curated by *Inventory Platform*, which is a not-for-profit organisation, that I co direct with artist Rhine Bernardino, and it was originally conceived to happen in a real space at Guest Projects in London in Broadway market but had to move to the digital realm due to the pandemic. Since then, I've curated a few other projects online but *Where I'm Coming From* was the first experiment, let's say. So, the month-long programme was dedicated to four languages that are very much present and spoken by a big

portion of the migrant community, actively working and contributing to the British economy yet highly invisible, Filipino, Berber languages, Taiwanese and Yoruba. The programme aimed to tackle the exclusivity of language in accessing the production and consumption of arts and culture, alongside considering the wider cultural presence of underrepresented artists and groups in the international art debate. Next slide, please. The programme showcased three artists each week allocating two days to each artist. The aim was to utilise only one specific language per week, the text used to mediate each work were in this case in Filipino, and the English translation would follow the original language in a sort of subordinate position. We really wanted to highlight the kind of importance of language and its potential for communal organisation, but also how it serves as a ground for separation. And we did so by generating an environment which was hard to access for the English-speaking audience. Who in order to know more had to engage, sort of complicating their user experience. So, you see here, for example, an image of Gynophobia, which was a live performance hypnosis, taking place over zoom. And we negotiated with the artist Lilibeth Cuenca Rasmussen a way in which to integrate the sort of translation in real time in Tagalog. So, we provided an artist that was sort of working with Lilibeth in order to coordinate and it proved to be really a fruitful and really interesting collaboration. Next slide, please. The projects oriented towards increasing opportunities for new ways of working collaboratively, rethinking the arts impact in a pandemic scenario. At the end of each week, we also programmed cooking sessions to allow the general audience to learn about each cultural group's cuisine, to possibly reproduce and engage in their own homes. For the cooking sessions, we engage various community groups, and it was really fascinating to see how the groups interpreted the brief in very different ways and format. In the Filipino week, for example, we had a group of UK-based migrant workers who produced a talk show like format, where they were cooking a national dish called a dough ball and discussing at the same time Filipino culture in a very sort of engaging and humorous way. Next slide, please. The variety of works showcase encompasses live performance, video works, GIF, animation, text, base and image works. And we wanted to keep working with the artists that we originally selected for the in real life programme, who weren't necessarily digital artists who are kind of acquainted to work in that space. Therefore, we had to work really closely with each of them to discuss the best adaptation of the work into the digital realm and support them in this sort of transition. The initial artists selection came from multiple processes, including lots of research, I wished to engage with certain artists, as well as deepening the partnership we had, for example, with the Yinka Shonibare Foundation, who has a corresponding foundation launching in Nigeria, Lagos. And so, it was for us important to sort of generate this dialogue and connect with the resources we had available. Next slide please. The programme emphasised the importance of highlighting diversity and multiculturalism in such unique times considering strategies for working together and supporting each other. Despite living in very different contexts. We were extremely careful in

focusing on the mediation of each work, we produced captions for each video, we were very sort of straight in this because the mediation was really important. Being all about language, we had a huge budget for translation, we had audio files and easy read guide for the programme. In doing so, we offered various entry points into the work for a whole set of diverse audiences. For this cooking session, for example, you see a group of Moroccan cooks preparing this wonderful octopus tajine on a beach in Morocco. It was really poetic. Next slide, please. The aim of the programme was to highlight the several micro narratives of exclusion that exist within those who face cultural and language barriers, wanting to offer visibility to really meaningful body of work. Our target audience was obviously the sort of UK arts community, but also those who don't necessarily engage with the arts, but they do understand the language. We also had media partners in their respective countries to sort of enhance the works distribution beyond the UK. Next slide, please. The programme itself was spread across the main Guest Projects' website. We also had a weekly newsletter and daily social media posts. The month was coordinated and choreographed to offer great visibility to the artists' work across platforms. Presenting both old works when they were relevant, obviously to the topic, but also new commission. And some works were there for the audience to experience anytime, others were premiering at specific times and dates. So, we were again playing with the temporality of the space. Next slide, please. Such complex and modular programme definitely had its risks, especially because we're not a big institution. And there wasn't obviously much tech support available, especially considering the distance and all the hiccups that can occur when depending on the internet connection. In this regard, it was essential for us to perform duties of care and really double checking with the artists making sure to establish great communication with all the parties involved in order to maximise the artists' work in the programme. In the Yoruba week, for example, we had an hour long, an hour and a half long live performance from Lagos. And we agreed to make sure to rehearse this in advance and discuss with the artists, the pros and cons of being live versus offering a pre-recorded format. And so really negotiate and discuss the artistic choice and the modalities of engagement coming from such choice. So, it was really much a process of negotiation to adapt to the digital space. *Where I'm Coming From*, which happened in August was the first iteration, a testbed which will be helpful to devise future iterations of the programme. And as the programme began, we were immediately faced with the existing limits of digital communication, we noticed that this jointed phenomenon, sorry, next slide, please. A disjointed phenomenon regarding how certain posts on social media were highly appreciated, yet the amount of views of the actual work was reduced. So, we promptly realise how in certain countries social media are accessible and free as part of a plan, whereas navigating on the internet becomes a paid service. For again, the social media impression were really a synonym of full engagement. So again, questioning what is really kind of online digital real engagement? Next slide, please. This is an example of how the programme was spread to maximise the

audiences and tap into the diverse communities. So, you see the mail out and the various kinds of social media, it was important to us to reflect from the shift from an in real life space to the digital one, what has been lost during this shift, considering especially the app to 2019, 57% of the global population were internet users, and English accounted for 60% of all online content. So, it was really pivotal for us to consider that, that has been lost in the shift and the digital sort of physical interaction that will last in the process, particularly when envisioning future iteration of the project both offline and online. And then next slide, please. These are some final stats where you can see the social media engagement and that discrepancy. I was mentioning, you know, hopefully, we really weren't focusing on kind of make advertisement on social media, but really about the work. So, it was interesting to explore this discrepancy. And I want to just leave a final consideration the archival potential of the project, and the values generated by the artists' works in highlighting the mother tongue, and the variety of dialects almost disappearing, that exist within *Where I'm Coming From* itself. As well as the sort of discourse of the permanent dimension of the online space compared to the more temporary one of the kind of exhibition format. So yeah, this is it. This is it for me and thank you for listening.

[Video audio] 20:14

I stopped myself from crying by laughing, smiling. Pretending distraction [music playing] screens [pages turning] words, sounds [train goes by] anything to transport me [water dripping] I fight for the of switch. Shutting down the machine that I am [click] I can't stop myself from crying.

Roseanna Dias 21:35

Okay. Thanks, Linda for that really great presentation. As Amanprit said, I am Roseanna Dias. I'm a producer from Bristol. My pronouns are she/her. I'm a mixed South Asian, white British cis woman, I'm aged 31. Got long, dark hair, wearing an orange shirt, and I'm sitting in a green room. So, the clip you've just seen is one of the three film pieces which make up the case study I'm going to speak to you about today called *Under My Skin*. And when the presentation comes up, you will see a photo taken, here we are, of some of the crew in the golden hour outside, taken outside integrates offices where we filmed. Can I have the next slide, please, Lili. So, a little bit about Rising. Rising is based in Bristol, and we support young people aged 18 to 30 to challenge inequalities in the creative sector. Our work is youth-led and it's about making visible those who are currently underrepresented in the sector. And the work really manifests itself in a variety of ways. Through showcasing young artists' work both on our website and on the streets, through bringing in other high-profile commissions to both challenge the status quo and provide employment to young people. We champion authentic voices and lived experiences. And we also recognise that this conversation often needs to go beyond the boundaries of our close community. And our work with the CO-Creating

Change cohort in particular, is supporting us to reach new communities in in mindful and meaningful ways. And we create pathways and support for young people to be leaders in the sector and input into strategic conversations including sitting on boards. So, Rising really works at this intersection of community and the creative sector. And we're constantly learning and evolving as part of a small team pictured here, and a much wider crew of young creatives and activists. The next slide please. So on to the case study. *Under My Skin* was a project that we realised back in autumn 2019, which feels like years and years ago now. It was created in response to *The Destructors*, a film by Imran Perretta, which was screening at Spike Island in Bristol. So, 11 young people of colour and of mixed heritage were invited to take part in conversations and workshops exploring the themes of identity and marginalisation present in the exhibition. And across two workshops, we explored personal testimonies developed film, photographic and audio skills. And we created this series of short films. And *Under My Skin* is a triptych that focuses particularly on the identity of young women as a counterpoint to Imran's film and explores ideas of vulnerability and self-love. Creating really intimate portraits of personal experiences through spoken word and visual poetry. And the film we created then screened alongside Imran's in the gallery, and on opening night, we invited other members of our communities to perform and together we enjoyed their offerings of dance, spoken word and we discussed the work and what it means to do this kind of work. This was a Spike Island commission, and it was delivered in partnership with Integrate, a youth-led charity that empowers young people to take an active role in transforming the society they live in. It's interesting, that Integrate, this key partner in the project, is often not mentioned, and perhaps because they sit outside of the creative sector. And yet the lived experience that those young people from Integrate brought to this project was invaluable. It relates to our firm belief at Rising in this kind of ever-expanding notion of what creativity is. We engage not just with artists, but also incredible creative and critical thinkers. And *Under My Skin* was really an interesting opportunity to bring together artists, from our community, with activists from Integrate and learn from one another. And we're asked to do a lot of collaborations and partnerships. And it feels like with this project, it wasn't to do so much with the prestigious Spike Island, as it was to do with the phenomenal power and poetics of Imran's work that attracted us to say a big yes. And the fact that Imran wanted to be involved to be present our first workshop, our evening event to meet our crew, it was a massive draw. So, speaking to one of the artists contributed to the project recently, they spoke specifically to this collapsing of the artists participant divide, saying that was quite an unusual and empowering thing to be creating and performing in proximity to Imran and I think that, you know, in Rising our DNA is kind of, we're thinking constantly about how we are nurturing community and connection and flattening some of the hierarchies that we come across. My next slide, please, Lili. So, the first thing to know is that we didn't come into this project with preconceptions about what the outcome would be. We workshopped this with

participants and Imran and Spike, were really happy to take a backseat and to be led where we needed to go according to our young people. And we knew we could show something in the gallery if we wanted to, we knew we could have a kind of convening event. But essentially, it was an open brief. And our parameters were really the budget and the time that Sham Ahmed, my co producer on this who also worked at Integrate, they were kind of the parameters in which we had to deliver this. And so, we focused on the skills that we each had and the desires of the people who came along. And from the beginning, it was the process that was valued as much if not more than the product. And I think that's not always the case. So, we knew we wanted to hold space for people in our communities to get to meet him with that conversation and move into some creative activities that would enable us to bring our reflections, our stories, personalities into the process. And as workshop leaders, we created the framework to collectively write the poetry that you see in the films, people really gifted their ideas to this process. And then we all together pulled it into three distinct film ideas with overarching themes. And we did this in person, but also remotely when this wasn't even a thing. with people who couldn't physically make the second workshop, they were co editing the scripts and storyboards on Google Docs from their beds. And we all made it what it needed to be. And similarly, with the event, we put a shout out for members of our community to come forward and then we offered them a fee for that input. For me, this project was a pivotal moment in my practice as a creative producer and curator. And it proved to me that the best co creation happens when you feel this sense of expansiveness. That can also feel a bit scary, like things haven't settled yet. And it requires just the most gentlest of holding for the good stuff to emerge. And I was speaking with our director Kamina Walton last week, she'd been on a recent zoom gathering where Carey Robinson, who's the Head of Learning at South London Gallery said, "If you feel you're losing control, you're probably co designing and this is a positive space to be in". And like that really sums up that process and that feeling for me. Next slide, please. And I think it's really important to say that *Under My Skin* was only possible because of the relationships we've developed with our communities through longer term projects, such as Whose Culture which nurtured conversation and community, both online and offline for young creatives of colour, which saw our demographic shift from 40 to 60% POC see over the course of two years, and along the bottom of this slide, you see 10 young creatives, some of whom have been involved in his culture and *Under My Skin*, they are now part of a *Be It*, our radical leadership programme, which again has been co created from the very beginning and continues to shift depending on our community needs. So, this work exists as part of a continuum that's built on trust with communities that are already embedded within Rising. And what Spike understood and recognised in this commission was that Rising and Integrate have already developed these deep relationships and ways of working over time. And so, they trusted us to hold the commission as we felt we needed to. And I think that is fundamental. It's not about parachuting in. Spike didn't insist that their team did

this work. They understood that to do this work, they had to pay us as organisations to figure out in step with our communities, what it would look like and then find a process to bring Imran into that and using Spike as a conduit. So, instead of working to the idea of young people bringing their ideas into the institution, the institution here became a resourced holding space for critical collaborations to happen, which were led by what we as a group felt should happen and the sense of agency, ownership and joy that this creates cannot be underestimated. *Under My Skin*, wouldn't have had the value or the poignancy for the young people and the audiences if it hadn't been for the way all the other work could happen before. It isn't exactly replicable. But hopefully, in sharing the story of *Under My Skin*, some of the principles at its heart can be practice developed by others, when thinking about socially engaged public art projects that involve people who are othered by the sector and society, and just the final slide, has our website address on www.rising.org.uk, you can go there to check out more of our work. And just thank you for listening. And I'm looking forward to the discussion. And thanks.

Amanprit Sandhu 31:48

Thanks so much, Roseanna and Linda, I'm just going to give Lili a prompt to put up the second question for our attendees. And I guess I want to start there are some questions which I'll come to but there are things from both your presentations that really spoke to me, I really like this idea of losing control. Because actually, that's, I know sort of all not all of us, some of us will feel this, that's quite a scary place to be as a curator or producer, but I really kind of love that as an idea and co designing, negotiation Linda you spoke about. And I guess my first question is, you pointed towards it in both of your presentations, this is a broad question, but it's really broad so that you can come at it from your own experience. But I wondered, in your, in both your cases, what are the strategies that support participants to have agency and platform their voices? What for you are those strategies and where in your own projects or elsewhere have you seen that working the best? I hope that's not too broad a question. But Linda, perhaps if we start with you.

Linda Rocco 33:01

Sure. Thanks, Amanprit. And thanks Roseanna for the great presentation. Well, I guess in terms of strategy, really, it's about losing controls and tales, as well as having a certain degree of trust and really be able to, sort of, move away from a position of somehow, you know, directing from above, in a sort of master puppet dimension. But really being able to give the space and the conditions for the artists in this case to work kind of freely and process kind of ideas in a flexible yet supported way as well. You know, being there, being available to discuss works to discuss sort of questions, to rehearse, to really have that conversation and then follow the process from early conception to then what is the delivery sort of in a

process of negotiation, yes. Which is very much about listening as well, more than maybe talking. Yeah, I think that. That's me.

Amanprit Sandhu 34:14

Thanks, Linda.

Roseanna Dias 34:19

Yeah, thanks, Linda. Just like I was nodding, furiously like nodding away. That all really resonates. I think you spoke about listening. And I just think it's something that we don't, we don't practice enough, just in general, but in terms of what we kind of get trained to do, like reading, we spend, like, we get, like 12 years of reading training, and we actually communicate with it something like 9% of the time, whereas listening, we kind of get no training and it really and we use it 45% of the time. So, it's like there's a real, there's a real lack of being able to listen and actively listen. And I think just as a basis for how you work with people in new ways, it's like, just, just listen, just really hone that listening skill, that active listening skill, and when you're listening, don't feel you have to come up with all the answers, you can, just being witnessed and listening is a really important thing. And I think sometimes, I know for myself as like a producer-type person, I want to like help fix and solve, and, and all of that, but actually allowing people, trusting people to have the, the answers the way forward themselves, and being a kind of holding space for them to express that feels really important. And I just think it's not really part of our culture. And at Rising, we've done a lot of training around coaching and how you hold coaching space. And a huge part of that is active listening. So, I think, yeah, that's a huge, important strategy that just doesn't get enough airtime.

Amanprit Sandhu 36:10

Yeah, I mean, what you've said about active listening, akin to deep listening really does resonate, which then leads me to another broad question, but one, I think both of you are in a really good position to speak to, which is, then what are the formats that exists right now, in our kind of organisations, or in the sectors that aren't working, that aren't allowing us to do that active type of listening, allowing us to lose control? Or, you know, we're in fear of that, that, you know, is it something to do with time? Is it the structures and the formats that need to shift? Is it, yeah, just a prompt in a provocation?

Linda Rocco 36:53

Thanks, Amanprit that will take a long answer. But to be sort of short, I would say that, well, there's lots of things that don't really work right now. And I think we are prone to work in a way which really fits into neoliberal capitalist narrative of as well producing in sort of post for this imperative. So again, very much linked to producing objects and evaluating following very much kind of metrics and ticking boxes. And so, I think really the way in which we understand that the way in which

institutions deal with the work we do, could be and should be much more flexible, we are often as well kind of brought in the discussion in very short terms. And it's very rare to kind of generate that long term environment of learning and sharing. So, I think would very much work on this kind of short-termism, having to again, depending on funding structures, which are often kind of shady and requires lots of back work, and then sort of bureaucracy, which sometimes really benchmark the value of all that we do into some sort of siloed categories. So, I think there's many problems in the so called "art world" and the way in which things are done right now, but hopefully, as well, the pandemic and these all shift to more kind of digital formats will be helpful in opening a bit more our eyes and as well were coming out of cooperative forms of participation where the sort of tasks and duties are much more shared rather than being centralised in that view.

Amanprit Sandhu 38:45

And Roseanna, is there anything from your experience that you want to add to that?

Roseanna Dias 38:50

Yeah, I think, well, everything, everything that Linda's spoke about really, yeah, really rings true. And I think, I mean, just kind of going, going back to, you know, the kind of provocation of for this event around the buzzwords and the co-option really have lots of words and terms that you see in the sector. I mean, I guess I was speaking to a producer friend called Angie Bual who runs Trigger. And they described a lot of what they saw last year, around the Black Lives Matter uprisings following the murder of George Floyd. And that it was this, became very, very evident in a kind of, like, super turned up to max volume way, that the issues that were affecting people of colour in the industry, were very much seen, but not necessarily felt by many and I think that feeds into this kind of, there's a lot of talk of inclusion, there's a lot of talk about diversity. But actually, people are not practised in the walk. And, when there are opportunities for "diverse work" to be created. It's often pigeonholing people into making work specifically about their identity or their story. And sometimes that's wanted and desired. And other times they just want to make work about like, you know, something completely unrelated in a sense. And I kind of, you know, picking up on what Linda was saying that there is often not that flexibility. And that space for flexing and moving in step that it's just not practised and not seem to be valued, because it's very, can be very extractivist, and very kind of everything sort of a means to an end. So, I'm really interested in production processes, curatorial processes, which totally, like, flip that around, and then don't start with an outcome that focus a lot more on the process.

Amanprit Sandhu 41:17

Yeah, I think there's, again, something around sort of value, which is, again, a really kind of more longer conversation that feels kind of important to yet drill down on as a sector as well. I'm now going to open up a bit more, taking in sort of questions from the attendees. But one of the things that I did want to do as the chair of this event was acknowledge questions that and I hope it's okay to yeah, we've received questions about the accessibility of the event, which is an important one. And I'll speak just from my personal point of view, in response to that it. It is a blind spot for the event. And I know, Emma will speak to that question directly. And it will, you know, it was also mentioned that we, again, talk about these buzzwords, and then how, how is that enacted? You know, in an event like that, in an event like this, where we haven't sort of provided captions, and other things, and I guess what I would like to say is, this is not a cop out answer, but, you know, the kind of problem is systemic, and it's behavioural in the way that we kind of do things as professionals and it takes time to, you know, undo that. And I can talk from, you know, hearing both you, Roseanna and Linda just described sort of where you were and what you were wearing. I'm still learning about that, personally, you know I've been kind of professionalised and socialised in a particular way in the art world. Which means, of course, there are huge emissions and there's also emissions when we ask this question, who has agency whose voices are heard? But also, the audiences we're addressing with that when we haven't thought about access completely in the event. It is, yeah, it's a blind spot. And I think it's important to acknowledge that, but what I would say is I'm UP Projects will respond to this and incorporate it into future events. But thank you so much for pointing that out. Because it's important to do so. So, one of the things that we asked as our second question was "Has your understanding of diversity changed over the past year?" And the response we've got is 78% of attendees have said yes, it has. And 23 have said no. And again, like Linda and Roseanna, I just wanted to ask from your experience over the past year what's shifted for you both personally and as professionals in the sector, when you think about these terms and the parameters of diversity, is it a kind of word that we need to be using anymore? You know, who does it serve?

Linda Rocco 44:15

Thanks, Amanprit. Well, I think, as we already said, diversity as a term is bit quite of a buzzword of the past year. But there's definitely some interesting and important conversation going on, on issues specifically regarding race and gender. In our sector, I believe there's still much work to be done, especially from kind of contemporary arts should diversify more, and really actively looking for less elitist approaches to make art to distribute and present art. I mean, I was myself shielding for this past year. So, I really think we should be, again, I don't want to go back to the flexible term, we should really be much more welcoming of diversity, because it's ultimately diversity, which makes that exciting variety and brings that new,

original fresh ideas, because otherwise, we really risk to fall into those dynamics and narratives that are a bit stagnant, and that we're already very acquainted with. So, I think diversity is needed to really bring those discourses that are important, feel relevant and feel timely, in a time where there's been a global pandemic.

Amanprit Sandhu 45:36

Thanks, Linda.

Roseanna Dias 45:37

Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely Linda. And I think a lot of our work, you know, I described it I described Rising as kind of sitting between the community and the sector and I think this year, I have, we have definitely observed the significance of young people from diverse backgrounds being a part of strategic level conversations and change particularly around the kind of social and political shifts that we've, you know, that we've seen in the last year, and particularly around, it sort of very feels like there's been a big shift. And a lot of a lot of people in those kind of, around those boards, tables, or in the exact kind of teams of arts organisations are dealing with an unprecedented level of like uncertainty. And there's actually a real opportunity here to kind of open up that space for other people who essentially, they actually do need to involve, for their sustainability for their relevance. And for a lot of these questions that it feels keep coming up time and time again, around, how do we get more diverse audiences to see this work, etc, etc? You know, part of it is that grass roots stuff, but it's also about impacting where the decisions are being made. And we have a programme where we recruit and train and support young people into governance roles. And it's very difficult without a programme like that for us to infiltrate at strategic level. And particularly in terms of paid roles, because there's, there's a ladder you have to climb. But actually, in terms of boards, it's really interesting, because it's not a paid role. And actually, in the week of the BLM uprisings, people want that diversity of voice. And, you know, these young people don't have a CV as long as your arm, but they have experiences and new ways of thinking that will be absolutely invaluable for the sector to survive and thrive in the future.

Linda Rocco 48:08

Can I? Sorry.

Amanprit Sandhu 48:09

Linda, go ahead.

Linda Rocco 48:11

Well, if I could just add a point because Roseanna, I think was very timely, brought up the kind of audience diversity in the sense that I just feel relevant to add that I think it's not enough nowadays to just say that, you know, oh, yeah, this

programme is open to everyone. You know, everyone is welcome. Everyone can come. But it's actually important to, as well, highlight how this is welcoming for specific audiences. So, for instance, I had a quick gaze at the chat and there's these discourses on kind of engaging with artists to a mother or a kind of parenting role, and it's as well important that while advertising certain opportunities, let's say, ways in which you can really support mothers or certain people with specific access needs should really be visible in the call in the invitation of the event. Rather than advertising, sort of an event open to all or a call for everybody really trying as well, to reach out to those communities, you really want to engage them and make sure the message gets to them. And as well, you kind of accommodate everything it feeds to make sure that the processes were suitable and for those specific constituencies, yeah.

Amanprit Sandhu 49:26

Yeah, I mean, Kirsten's comment is in the chat. And I think that idea of the creative environment needs to include all generation or sort of generations of art practitioners is a very sort of important one. I'm looking at the questions we have on one of the questions which Roseanna is connected to the project you worked on, I'm just going to read it to you so you can respond, "It was nice seeing that insight into Imran Perretta's 'The Destroyers' and the way this project came out of that a new texture of the work being connected, it is an opposite to my initial engagement with the work, which was seen at the Chisenhale Gallery, in a cold art gallery, very detached from wider communities. And of the experiences that makes the work, it makes me think does all art practices have to have a connection to being in cold art spaces detach from community, despite whatever projects programmes come out of it?" So, I think this is a broader question, you know, about sort of how artists see sort of their work being presented? There was, of course, choices sort of there about where this film was going to be presented. But I wonder if both of you could speak to that more about that sort of conversation around, you know, where sort of art takes place where process takes place? And then does it then have to be presented back in sort of the white cube? And also, connected to that question, you know, is that question even relevant? You know, yeah, it would just be good to get your opinions in response to that note.

Linda Rocco 51:12

Do you want to go Roseanna?

Roseanna Dias 51:15

Sure thanks. Yeah, a really great comment and question. I guess, in terms of like, where the art takes place, and whether it has to be in the white cube, or, you know, an institution, I guess, the point is that institutions are organisations, people with buildings, whilst they have become a difficult space to manage, during COVID, they

hold a lot of the resources, that are kind of, that support the work getting made that house the work. And I think it's really important to note that, you know, they're publicly funded institutions that are there to promote and support and showcase work. So, there's definitely a purpose there. But, you know, I would just say, as well that, you know, my experience and thinking a lot over the last year, you know, we're making our own spaces, to be honest we're taking over the streets and putting our stuff there. So, we exist as part of an ecosystem, and the institutions are really important, really important. But I would also say, you know, we need to remember that not everything necessarily needs to, that doesn't need to be seen as the final place. Like, maybe it's a steppingstone, maybe it's a conduit, you know, I talked about Spike as being conduit. So how can it be a conduit for the talent, for the energy without kind of trying to contain it? which essentially, or extract from it, which is essentially a kind of, yeah, a neoliberal capitalist kind of mentality. So yeah, I guess. Yeah. I'm interested in how you can shift to being a conduit. Yeah.

Amanprit Sandhu 53:14

Yeah. And also, that's interesting, because you have spoken about working with community and third sector, well, you didn't say third sector organisations, but their work also lends itself to, all that sort of way of working lends itself to sort of working with other types of agencies and organisations. And I'm just going to go to some other questions that we got. So, Ruth has said, speaking to Roseanna has points around the lack of true and concrete action around diversity in the cultural sector, after George Floyd's murder, if there are any freelancers here, who feel strongly about anti-race action, then I would love to hear from you. Okay, so that's in the chat. And it's really important that, it's nice to see this kind of events. Also, being a connector, so people coming together, so that wasn't so much a question. Just seeing what else because I've got lots of more questions, but it's important to see what comments we have. Okay, so Dan Goodman has said, rather than a patchwork of inclusivity, dealing with the challenges of individual groups, there is also the problem that inclusivity still centres white, cis and able-bodied people, I think we should be working towards the language of flexibility that accounts for all groups as well as the intersectionality of people's identity and experience. Well, I absolutely agree with that. And I, if I could comment on that a bit, Dan, what I'd say is that historically, our arts organisations in the arts, contemporary art field has sometimes found it hard to maybe hold those complexities, but things are shifting. Roseanna, I just want to kind of riff off one of the things you said, which is people are creating their own spaces and having their own conversations. And that's one of the things that not just over the past year, but I'd say for just seeing how peers are self-organising over the last sort of 18 to 15 months. And I do think this is a personal view that for some sort of change to take place, it needs to happen on a number of levels, like you've spoken about, I think governance is absolutely key, who's sitting on these boards, who's setting on kind of funding boards as well. But also, there needs to be sort of diverse approaches, which aren't necessarily linked

to arts organisations or sort of ACE-funded organisations. And I just wondered from both of your kind of peer networks and projects that you've seen, where have you seen that sort of being an active really well from your own areas of interest? Who are you seeing who are having interesting conversations? May there be peers or networks and it could even be the participants that you've worked with?

Linda Rocco 56:06

Thanks, Amanprit. Yeah, well, I really like the kind of language of flexibility sort of prompt that we should definitely develop. Well, I think also like the line that Roseanna said, we should you know, we are taking our own space, we're building our own space and I think this is happening as well online. Then if your line is public or not, I mean, we can get through lots of discussion here and I argue it's definitely not, but equally we've seen especially recently not necessarily in that domain, but you know what happened on Reddit for the Wall Street bets, basically, a self-organisation of people online, literally crashed the stock market for a couple of days. That's an example of how really through technology as well you can coordinate and cooperate. So, in these regards, I'm as well particularly looking at the kind of networks creation and in this line, the work of Further Field, which is kind of a decentralised gallery space. In a gallery yes, a space in Finsbury Park is really working towards as well developing this sort of network dynamics in using kind of feminist economies and cooperatives and principle of permaculture. Again, working really beyond the institutionalised spaces to build our own spaces where the governance is much more shared, the voting processes is less polarised or hierarchical. And it's lots of exciting work on that front.

Amanprit Sandhu 57:49

And Roseanna, is there anything that you'd like to add or anyone that you're sort of looking at or, you know, models or systems that you're thinking about?

Roseanna Dias 57:59

Yeah, I guess, we you know at Rising, we work with just, honestly the most incredible bunch of like, talented creatives, and everyone's under 30. They're all like, they're all creating, they're creating the change that they want to see. So, a lot of the work is not creative, but it's also got that kind of social change aspect to it. And you know, just thinking about our *Be It* programme in the cohort of 10 young people we've worked with in 2020, and the next 10 people that we're going to be working with in 2021. The, you know, the kind of the projects that they have been involved in and that they're going on to, kind of work on this year. All speak to the need to build spaces for our communities. To do the work and practice on our terms, and I would just encourage everyone to be honest to look at the www.rising.org.uk website and search for *Be It*. And you'll see kind of profiles of all of the young people. I mean, there's multi-disciplinary directors through to kind of people working more in sound and audio and making some really interesting

interventions there. We're releasing kind of the commissions that they've been working on and some of that is centring very much around like processes of care of how we slow down. And you can really start to see the importance of, of exploring this stuff as a cohort and those spaces to bring your individual practice but also kind of link up and I'm just, I'm really excited for what they're all going to kind of continue to work on. So, I would encourage people to have a look at them. There's some really interesting models and things that they're testing out.

Amanprit Sandhu 1:00:06

Really exciting. And, you know, that type of sharing doesn't really happen enough in the sector, where do we get to do that? So those are conversations I'm really interested in. There was a really lovely comment, which said that these conversations feel heart centred and I'm really interested, and I've used at the moment I'm working with one of the artistic directors with Jade Montserrat on *Syllabus* which is alternative education programme. And I started that conversation with that amazing group of artists through talking about Bell Hooks, kind of language of love. And I just wondered, and language has come up quite a bit in the thread in the chat thread and the importance of it. And I just wondered from your experiences, what it kind of means for the language around these conversations to shift but both the participants and the sector as well? And what it means to and what does it mean for each of you to have like heart centred conversations? And we're not talking about sort of willy hippy, although I'm also really interested in that. But what that what that might kind of afford, and what is it about language that has kept us in the same space when we're talking about ideas around agency, and inclusion and diversity, and I'd say stuck in a particular place. And I just wondered what each of you fought around sort of that subject of language?

Linda Rocco 1:01:33

Well, on my side, then, I mean, the project I presented as well is very much looking at that. I think language is crucial in the way in which society is run in the sense that we will have to comply to use a certain language from you know, as well, merrily kind of funding application to the evaluation processes and we almost have always to align to a certain language that often belongs to markets and industry but we're not really putting values on our own narratives and our own language in the way that sometimes you know, stress is very much on practices of care, of tension is often considered as you know, sort of like poetic or something that it's not really proper to more kind of official discourses. So, I think this shouldn't really be much really this shift of language towards really be more welcoming of as well nonverbal, less intelligible, and much more experiential ways of dealing with things without always being subjugated into then writing forms writing reports, which kind of match the sort of metric power and talking about heart centre conversation. I mean, it's definitely what the drive of what we do, and what we believe in that we try to put in our practice. And this is as well about really being willing to listen and

kind of as well exchange dynamics of hierarchies and really be present in everything we do. To me, that's, that's the most important for you really be present, rather than getting sort of lost. Yeah, it was clear.

Amanprit Sandhu 1:03:24

It was. Roseanna, have you got anything that you want to add to that?

Roseanna Dias 1:03:30

I think just to pick up on this point about listening and actually, how listening and reflecting when, when you're really doing that as part of your processes. There's a, there's the opportunity for vulnerability and actually, I think that's kind of at the heart of what we, what institutions in particular need to think about and to really reassess what they're, what they're doing and how the language is used. And I can see in the chat, someone's written about, you know, the language of inclusion and absolute, absolutely kind of assumes a cultural epicentre model, and this idea that the institution has agency. And I guess, from what I see, I'm interested in platforming, a completely different set of languages that's always changing and developing, in which we will resist being co-opted which it will happen. But there is a resistance and that in informing new language that works for you. Yeah.

Amanprit Sandhu 1:04:39

Thank you. I know, we're up to 10 past, which means we've run out of time, but I do want to acknowledge the conversation is really lively. And I think there's some important things to state around conversations like this, you know, sometimes we might spend an hour or an hour and a half together and realise that the question was the problem all along, you know, we don't have opportunities to think together. There was also a question around the fact that we're all in places of privilege to be sitting here. So, actually, if we're not involving anyone who's excluded, well, what is it that's taking place here? And I do think it's a question of ethics. Because I think, as far as I understood, the talk was about bringing professionals together and whatever that means and talking about our experiences with within the sector. But it's an important thing to note. But I think whenever you bring non-professionals into a talk like this, which is an art world talk, there is for me, personally, a question around ethics, who, why would they be interested in engaging in this? and we are all invested at varying degrees in the sector, in the art sector? And, yeah, I mean, it would be great somehow to capture some of these conversations and you know, see if, yeah, there's always too much. But some nice kind of will be in contact. I think everyone, you know, from what you've seen and heard, this is very much you know, just a kind of taster in terms of what type of conversations that a question in a talk like this kind of prompts. The works, not easy. It's longer term. I mean, they were kind of questions, there were things around strategies around slowness around embedded engaged practice, this work is kind of hard when you work, when you're thinking about these subjects. And it's a lifetime's worth of work. And you

either make a commitment as an arts professional in that way or not. And I'm going to end it there. That sounds like quite a grandiose statement, but it's about sort of commitments and, you know, networking with people who have shared commitments within the sector. I think that's quite key if we're going to answer some of these questions. But a big thank you, Linda, and Roseanna, it's been really nice for me because I'm learning about your practice for the first time. So, a big thank you, and a big thank you to UP Projects. And I'll hand over to Emma now.

Emma Underhill 1:07:19

Thank you so much Amanprit and Linda and Roseanna. It's been such a hugely valuable and vital discussion. And you know, as you've just articulated Amanprit, there's so much for the sector to learn and keep thinking about, and I think if we are going to make a shift in the way that we work, one of the best ways to do it. And one of the best ways to learn is to keep talking and keep sharing new ways of thinking and doing things. So hopefully, you know, this is just the very beginning of many more conversations. And thank you so much to our audience, as well for participating and for all the comments and questions that you shared in the chat. And we'll try and capture as much of that as we can. This is the first event in the *Assembly* series. And we really want to be able to listen and build on your feedback as well for future events. So Amanprit kindly said earlier, we particularly noted the comments in relation to access, how important is to include signing and captions, we'll work on this for the next event. And please do share any further feedback with us, we would really love to hear it and build on it. And to that end, you'll see there's questionnaire in the Slido bar, which we'd really love for you to fill out before you leave if you've got the time and very much hope we will see you at the next *Assembly* event which will be exploring *What is Collaboration?* And that event will be looking to unpick some of those sort of nutty questions around the ethics of collaboration and co creation working with communities. And that event will be chaired by Matteo Lucchetti, the curator of Visible Projects, we'll be announcing the full line up of speakers through our social media channels in a couple of weeks' time. So do sign up to those if you haven't already. And also, as I said at the beginning, we'll be sharing case studies about the two projects that Roseanna and Linda talked about today. So please do look out for those on our website. And if you'd like to watch Roseanna's film that Roseanna shared, *Under My Skin*, I think there's a link there that you can link to, to see the full video, it's really worth taking a look at that too. And we're going to be uploading a recording of today's event onto our YouTube channel, and so that you'll be able to link to that from our website as well. And if you'd like to hear more about what we're doing, in collaboration with Public Art Network, more information about the *Assembly* programme, please do join our mailing list, and we'll keep you posted on that. So, I think we're out of time. So, thank you again, to our amazing speakers. Thank you to the Art Fund for supporting this programme and to Public Art Network for inviting us to collaborate with them and particularly to Jes Fernie, Theresa Bergne from



Public Art Network and Elizabeth Del Prete, UP Projects' curator of learning and live research, for putting together such a great programme. So yeah, let's keep talking and I look forward to seeing you at the next one. Thank you so much.