

Constellations ° Assemblies: What is the role of democracy in social practice - can all voices be heard?

Transcript

Elisabeth Del Prete 0:05

Hello, everyone. Good afternoon and welcome to the third of our online *Assemblies, What is the role of democracy in social practice - can all voices be heard?* I'm Elisabeth Del Prete, Senior Curator at UP Projects. And I am a white woman with long curly brown hair, and I'm wearing a white top. I go by the pronouns of she/her. I'm really pleased that you're joining us for this event as part of the *Constellations ° Assemblies*, which is a series of free online events, open for everyone to attend, who is active and/or interested in the expanded field of public art. The programme takes place between March and November 2022. And by the "expanded field", we mean the work that happens at the intersection of contemporary art and culture, social practice and the public realm. In the UK, while there are increasing opportunities for socially engaged work, particularly in urban development, and regeneration programmes, there are very few opportunities to develop sector specific knowledge and skills. And to address this, UP Projects has developed this programme that is part of our wider *Constellations, Learning and Development Programme*. We're delighted to be working in partnership with Flat Time House, a partner with whom we've been collaborating for a number of years and Liverpool Biennial who are a new partner this year. The programme of six events, explores lines of inquiry that we feel are most vital for the sector to pursue right now. And these include questions around how can art affect social change, sustainability, and how can we go beyond that? Issues relating to the memorial and of course the question of democratic decision making that we're exploring today. If you haven't already done so, please do register for the other events in the programme via the UP Projects' website. I am delighted that today's event will be moderated by Ulrika Flink, Artistic Director at Konsthall C, a leading force in the socially engaged art scene in Sweden. Ulrika also curator-at-large for Black Archives Sweden and SETTINGS. But before I hand over to her, I would like to quickly run through some virtual housekeeping. So, if you do experience any technical issues during the event, please use the chat function at the bottom of your screen to chat with our dedicated tech support. On the right of your screen, you will see our Slido bar where you can post questions using the Q&A function for our speakers. Feel free to write your name when prompted a Slido uses anonymous as its default. Please note that our chair and speakers will be only picking up questions from the Slido Q&A and not from the chat - from the Zoom chat function. So please do post your questions in the Q&A to ensure they get answered. We also

have a British Sign Language Interpretation available for this event. If you need a BSL interpreter, please message us in the chat. And our tech assistant will give you a dedicated access link. If you would like to access closed captions, please select the CC button at the bottom of your videoconferencing screen to read along. And just to note that the event will be recorded today. I hope you enjoy the event today. Thank you for joining us and I'm now going to hand over to Ulrika who is going to kick off the event.

Ulrika Flink 4:02

Hi, everyone. Thank you very much for the introduction, Elisabeth and for inviting me to this programme. So, today's event, what is the role of democracy in social practice? So, I think that I would start with telling you a little bit about my background. But first off, my name is Ulrika Flink, and I'm a black woman. And I'm wearing a blue shirt; blue, blue and white stripes with black dots. I have short, Afro hair. And yeah, I'm sitting in an office in Paris with a white wall behind me. So yeah. So, to start off, I would like to remind everyone who's listening in that we welcome you all to participate. So that's how you do that is go to Slido and you can put your questions in the Q&A section, and we will look at those questions when we get to the discussion part. So, I'm briefly going to introduce myself and then by sharing some images for where I work. And then I'm also going to introduce our two guests, which is Adam James and Magda Fabianczyk, who will then talk for about 10 minutes each talking about their own practices. So let me see if I can share the screen here. Okay, so as Elisabeth said, I work in Stockholm at Konsthall C, and Konsthall C is an institution that's been around since 2004. And we are located in a public, public washroom, and this more laundry space, and this has been a laundry space since 1949, when it was built. And the really interesting thing is that, um, where we have our three rooms, where we show contemporary art and also house archive of the specific location of Hökarängen, which is a small borough in Stockholm. And on the other side of the wall, there is an active laundry space for all the community. So, we have sort of a built-in engagement with the, with the community by, you know, sharing the space of the laundry room. We engage, as Elisabeth said, in different types of exhibition making, but also very much sort of digging, where we stand making projects, with Hökarängen as the subject and the people who live there. One of our main objects is to be a leading partner in Sweden for socially engaged practices, but also looking at curatorial thinking and artistic experimentation. So, my own programme - here we see more images of Hökarängen - my own programme is centred around the notion of listening and being in relation, searching for new forms of connectivity that are determined and or defined by the depth of relationships and shared longing. The programme investigates through voice and language i.e., the ability to speak and the ability to formulate oneself in relationship to others, and one's own rights. The voice is both individual but it's also of course collective in its essence. No voice is heard alone, but appears as a stream, in a sea of other individual voices. The ability to see

someone in oneself, and based on this insight, speak and act in the world, is one of life's moral pillars. And this, were trying to reflect in our different projects. And of course, that is inspired by poet and philosopher Édouard Glissant. Embedded in the programme is a rich and rigorous thinking process around what it means to work with art, what it means to work in relationship to others, and what it means for art to be part of a democracy. And I'm really happy to speak further on these issues, together with our two panellists this afternoon. But before that, I would like you all to maybe check out the poll that you can see in Slido and the question there is: "can art and the making of art, make a difference and strengthen democracy in realisation of a more interconnected civil society?" And you have yes, no, or maybe as the three options, we will return back to this question at the Q&A. But I guess the very belief in art is one of the, it's one of the things that are drilled, you know, is sort of giving me power to continue working in sometimes difficult circumstances. A lot of you who are attending today, to listen to this has probably, also perhaps shared this core belief. I'm going to stop sharing and we will go to the introduction of Adam James. So, um, first of all, I'm going to read Adam's bio. So let me introduce him. Adam is born 1978. He's a British artist, at the heart of his practice is the desire to bring people together, in order to understand the self and to open up new ways of being and interacting. He uses nonverbal play to encourage forms of dialogue, meditation, and the reconsideration of sameness and difference. James makes sculptural objects, drawings, photographs, videos, and texts, that are all, that all arise from his steadfast involvement in the performative practice of live action roleplay, called LARP, which we will hear more of. James focuses in, James' focus is on the experimental style of Nordic LARP, which we will of course also hear more of. James position games positions the law as a tool to trigger on a micro level, future possibilities, new forms of collaborative democracy, and the temporary dismantle of hierarchies. So welcome to James. Sorry, welcome to Adam. Our second speaker today is Magda Fabianczyk and she's an international recognised multidisciplinary artist and activist and educator and the co-founder of the Polish Migrants Organise for Change (POMOC). Her work focuses on art and politics, combining narratives, narrative meditation, co creation and placemaking. To open up spaces for direct communication between those who could not otherwise meet, she taught Fine Art and Experience Design at UAL Central Saint Martin's, and its founding member of - I'm sorry for saying this wrong - Dziewuchy London, a UK Polish women's rights group. Magda will help me there. Magda has also worked with institutions such as Southbank Centre, the Kochi-Muziris Biennale and on commissions for Camden Alive and Islington Council among others. And I'm super happy to be in dialogue with both of them. And first off, we're going to ask Adam to have, to talk for approximately 10 minutes and share some images of his practice. So, the floor is yours, Adam.

Adam James 12:52

Thanks very much. Yeah, thanks very much for the nice introduction. I should just make sure that my screen is being shared, I think currently Ulrika your screen is still being shared. But I'm going to just share a presentation I've got here and go to this view - slideshow. Hopefully you can all see this okay? Yeah, so like, it's just to talk a bit about my practice very briefly, it was really always weird to hear your bios back there. I feel like they're always changing as time moves on. But yeah, I work with LARP (live action roleplay), I guess as a sort of methodology. Quite accidentally, really, I kind of just stumbled across it as a kind of a more nuanced, I guess, and kind of interesting toolset for kind of bringing people together through play. And so now I have a practice, I suppose, where I'm either makingLARPs, or I'm making environments and objects and scripts related to LARP as a means to bring people together. And so, it's yeah, I don't want to think about whether or not I have a particularly socially engaged practice, but I work with people. So, I suppose I sort of I do think about it in that way or not. But I wanted to show and share two projects, which felt relevant to this. And the first one I wanted to share is this one, which was a project in England, Kent with Turner Contemporary, which was a project called *Art Inspiring Change*. So, I'll just share some images from that. And then I'm going to try and share some images from a more recent project which I did like the Tate St. Ives a commission, which was called *KEMENETH*, which is Cornish for "community". So, the project here in Turner Contemporary, we were selected as you can see here, by the children from four different schools, which was in itself a kind of really interesting beginning to the project. They interviewed us and decided who was sort of the fun person, they would want to work with their school. And I was very lucky that I kind of connected with some kids from one of the schools, and over an 18-month period, I worked with them. I think probably the fact that I used roleplay and play in my work kind of struck a chord with the kids. And the project was one where the broad kind of mission was to try and use a children-led art project in Margate to kind of help regenerate parts of the area at the town, and to kind of instigate change from a kind of children lead perspective. And so, I worked with this school where art had been completely cut from the curriculum, actually, and it was, you know, they had like, images of the royal family in pasta shells on the wall, as he came in the school that was the extent of their art classes. And so, I dropped in there, and he started using LARP, as a way to kind of encourage the children to kind of think about putting themselves in the position of others. And this great image here, you can see is quite far into the project where half of the group are role playing the board members of the Thanet District Council, who are predominantly UKIP and Conservative Council at that point. And the other half of the group, we're pitching a proposal for public artwork to the council. And we did this as a way to kind of like, test the water for them, in advance of us knowing that they actually would end up in the council presenting the idea for their public artwork. So it was partly to kind of stress test the kids, but also to kind of put them in a position where they could be the voice of no, and then kind of

come back from that position with a kind of more empathetic understanding, perhaps of what it is to, to be the council members who might object to the plans for the public artwork. And they then presented this in the council. And it was just like, absolutely glorious to behold, these kids just like taking everybody to town. And through this project, we eventually ended up proposing a sort of regeneration of a totally underused woodland area. And there's no sound on this video by the way, we read we generated this old woodland and filled it full of sculptures, it was called the Walking Rollercoaster. And they invited children and members of the neighbourhood in Margate to come and take part in this kind of playful reimagining of this underused forest. And we had these four different schools involved in the projects. And I was working with the school in Tivoli Woods, it was great actually, because I lived next door to the school as well. So before and after the project. And throughout it, I would see all these children every day, on the way to school, and on the way to work. And this was a map of the work we did and some images of the final thing we made in the forest. And what you can see here is children who are making bird sculptures out of plasticine, which they put on sticks. And then we had a kind of procession of these birds through the town, which everybody joined and ended up at Turner Contemporary. So that kind of brings me to another coastal project, which I guess, is a bit of a theme, I guess. In a way, I kind of think that I've ended up with a practice that sort of maybe a social practice, as a sort of accidental by-product of working with roleplay, I think there's a lot of mutual kind of shared aims, really, it you know, I suppose I always approached my work in the beginning with an idea to kind of create an image or a film, which documented some kind of human; play roleplay with people pretending to be characters. And in the beginning, I just did that very clumsily, I didn't really know how best to do that. And over time, and then discovering LARP, I realised that much kind of better toolset for kind of helping people enter into a kind of more co-creative co-authored space. And a lot of those kinds of outcomes from that, feelings of kind of transformational growth, perhaps, you know, to be grand, or just, you know, trying new things and trying to put yourself in the shoes of others had a very kind of sympathetic relationship to the kind of aims often at the goals of these kinds of socially engaged outreach projects. So, its kind of, the two things sort of fell in line with each other, accidentally. So, it just sort of started to happen that I was invited to work with specific groups in an area. And in this case, I was invited by Tate St. Ives, to work specifically with the community in St. Ives, and this is during lockdown. And so, these images you can see here are some of this I do like digital painting. And so, we use these digital images as a kind of score with which we would play in digitally remotely because this project was done during, as I say, lockdown the *KEMENETH* project. And the goal of this project was to try and bring people together during lockdown during a time of isolation through some new means, had COVID not been the case, I would have been in England playing with them physically. But as it was, we used a lot of new technology that I hadn't used before. So spatial chat. So, what you can see here, this is like a drawing, but people

could move around this image and talk with one another. And then we made a series of other kinds of co-authored spaces, which were based on, you know, ideas from the participants. I'm jumping ahead a little bit here by mistake. But we eventually led to us doing quite big and brave things. I think for the people that took part in this, we worked with about 8 to 10 people from St. Ives, most of them were not tech savvy at all. And we were always trying to kind of work towards the cultivation of a sort of new type of space where there was a kind of flat hierarchy, and everybody's voice kind of mattered. And in the end, that's very sympathetic with suppose how we work in LARP. Let me just jump forwards. Eventually, that led to the creation of a more kind of developed virtual space, which the community in St. Ives played from the position of fictional characters they'd created. And through working with them over four months, we decided, or they sort of decided, we decided together to try and create two fictional communities, which addressed real world needs for them as residents in St. Ives, who at the time felt excluded from communities they would normally hang around with, or friends or family. So, they kind of created like a fictive solution to that. And then creating a world where these fictive community groups could meet one another, to sort of see what comes out of it. And what you can see here with these images is a workshop space that we oh, let me just get back to slideshow mode. So, I tried to replicate it, sorry, classic jumping around, my bad. What I wanted to do is to try and replicate something that I would do physically when I run a LARP. So, we have a workshop space and then we go off and we sort of play in a in an environment, whether it's in a building or outside, and we sort of replicated that digitally. So, people run these simultaneous workshops, where they became these characters, we taught them the controls. And eventually they met online as these two communities and these two separate islands, which kind of represented two parts of St. Ives with sculptures and objects, which were things inspired by objects from their home. And eventually, this kind of was also manifest in the gallery as physical versions of the digital avatars they'd created and physical objects that were like, my translations of things from their home. And we also made an augmented reality app. So, we tried to kind of create various spaces which the extended public could meet in and kind of have a new way of being with one another through play in different kinds of formats. So, I probably should just jump out of that now. And close that down and try to come back to this. Hopefully, that's kind of just in the nick of time. But yeah, that's me. So hopefully, that there was some value in that, and it wasn't too rambling *[laughter]*. And I'll hand over now to Magda.

Ulrika Flink 23:42

Thank you so much, Adam. Yes, Magda, please.

Magda Fabianczyk 23:46

Thank you. Let me share my screen...can you see my screen now?

Ulrika Flink 24:00

Yes, we can.

Magda Fabianczyk 24:02

Okay, perfect. I'm just going to bring all of you here so I can also see you. If I speak too quickly, which is my tendency, please let me know and then I will slow down for the interpreters. And so, I'm Magda, I'm a white woman with sort of semi length dark blonde hair and I'm in a white room, which looks like an office in a kind of t-shirt that resemble sea waves. I hope it gives some kind of idea. And so, my work explores relationship between art and politics. And in 2019, I co-founded together with Marzena Zukowska, migrant's rights organisation called Polish Migrants Organised for Change and we are also known as POMOC. So, we are predominantly organising the very large Polish community in the UK, it's around 900,000 people, but we do it in solidarity with other migrants and communities, and many of our projects is developed through partnerships and co-creation. And among things like direct support, campaigning or political education, a core part of our work are the sort of leadership support stipends where we offer, where we offer funding to, to people that would like to basically develop their ideas. And, and all this work is very much towards creating some kind of shift in the power dynamics that that we observe around, and also in seeing more migrants in the position of leadership. And I think that's very much linked to my practice. So, I sort of moved away a little bit over the last two years from, from working on strictly art projects, because I was setting up the organisation, but we are now looking to bring more of that kind of inclusive art practices into our space as well. And so, I really believe that co-creation if genuine and well planned, leads us towards new possibilities and these unexpected outcomes are sets of treasures, that that we would never come up individually. And they offer those kinds of prototypes for a different, what different models of societies or different workplaces, or different art institutions or so. In a way it here, I mean, on the slide, I have "democracy as an unfinished project that requires constant re-evaluation and re-imagining". And I really believe that democracy is this kind of ongoing and incomplete project that needs that needs this kind of constant re-imagining. And I suppose that co-creation makes this process more, more fair and more inclusive. And art can be this kind of playful environment that offers opportunities for people to practice democratising in their own spaces. So here, one of these images is actually it's an event from a series of *Edible Interventions*, and series of *Democratic Soup*. And it happened at Studio Voltaire, and it was in partnership with Eastern European Resource Centre, and art collective, They Are Here. And *Democratic Soup* is based on the sort of premise that each attendee brings an ingredient for a collective negotiation of what goes in a dish. And this becomes the kind of metaphorical starting point for a discussion around notions of democracy present in the work we lead, the way we live the way we work, how we organise our life, how we build relationships with other people. And, and, and collective cooking as well becomes this kind of way to connect,

negotiate and attempt to re-imagine a different democratic ideal in a way. And I organised it several times in different settings and each time participants contribution started with small provocations. So, the fear of statements and negotiations, but as we moved forward in our cooking activity, and people began to actually feel hungry, we move towards exploring compromise and practical solutions. So, at the end, we had we had something to eat. And the other project the other image here is from a project with the Roma community in Poland, *Unbelievable Things*. And this was an eight-year process with the Roma community in the Polish city, Bytom, and this is a very post-industrial city with I would say, third or fourth now generation of unemployment. So when Poland moved from, from the communist, from the kind of Communist regime towards democracy and embrace this, this very sort of a capitalist model imported from the United States, we kind of saw a lot of those areas that were that were thriving collapsing, industry collapsing, but also communities sort of being disconnected from well, well disconnected from for example, the city centres or from opportunities or from - and we kind of saw very much in this particular city as well across the years very bad a politic of the of the local authority towards the Roma community. So, it's, there is a lot of, I mean, as we can see as well in the in the UK migrants are often blamed for problems with NHS on unemployment. So, the same over there, we could see that the Roma community was blamed for quite a lot of issues such as for example, you know, other people not being able to get work and so on. And, and also it was perceived as this kind of very hermetic group. That was very, that was very difficult to access. I got; I got a prompt that I should move on. So maybe I moved to another image, which this is, this is this is from one of the projects with the Roma community. And as an as a migrant in the UK, I work predominantly in this context of migration with groups of individuals that find themselves in minority often discriminated against. So, the aim of many of these projects is, like I said, it's shifting the existing power dynamics, to kind of on the sort of multiple levels, and making gallery and more accessible space for people so they can use it to, as a free resource, and also to organise and strengthen their power. And, and in that process, it's really important to acknowledge the creative potential of all those people that come into the project as participants. So, I don't want to make work about certain groups of people, but actually with them, and a lot of decision making is shared. So, this is this is a project from the series of *Unbelievable Things* from the same exhibition. And we actually use this kind of idea of Joseph Beuys public lectures, we work with children from that area of Bytom, that whose parents were really struggling economically, and the children themselves sort of had that didn't really well, they didn't have access to many of the resources that, for example, someone in a different city in Poland would have. And we've, we've looked at them, and they are at the idea on the kind of, so let me move to this just to show you. So, we've worked with this idea of a game snakes and ladders, and we looked at how we can actually achieve aim and what might be the barriers to achieving a kind of goal or, or achieving, you know, what our desires are, and how might how we might

get there. And, you know, things emerge, such as, for example, well, actually, our you know, there was racism here, there is there is there is an issue with homophobia, there is an issue with discrimination. So, we would pack, unpack that collectively with children, and then they would decide on specific elements and specific rules for the game so other people could play it later. And moving back to where it was, some of the ideas as well behind my work are associated democracy, so how we kind of decentralise the processes. This sort of idea of artists as an uninvited guest, and, and looking at, at others as adversaries rather than enemies. I mean, obviously, you know, in certain spaces, when we work with figures like Priti Patel, I don't think we can, we can hope for her to be our adversary. But for, but for example, local authorities in Poland might, there are people out there that we might bring in and start these conversations. And this is this is a project in Poland, with the Roma community again, this was actually the first collaboration where we created a meeting between the representatives of the Roma community, and the representatives of the local authorities in Poland. And, and we use gallery space as this sort of space, a safe, safer environment for this conversation to happen. Because Roma never ever had the chance to sit around the round table with people who are actually holding power in that area. And we've invited representatives from the city, the city council, but as well, police and the and the local church. And the discussion was led by Roma representatives. This was actually the project, this this work where I was not it's actually something completely different that I had planned when I went to Bytom, but I spent one year over there discussing the Roma situation with Angela Mirga a local Roma activist and entering the community with her. And we decided that actually, rather than making the film, which was my idea, initially, we would create an event that would be a closed event with no public, but where Roma would have this kind of possibility to sit around the round table, which is quite symbolic in Poland, if you know a little bit about the Solidarity movement as well, to see the around the roundtable and have an undirected conversation and it started with the words of Angela, "I would like to enter those areas where I've never been", which meant that she couldn't, for example, go to a shop and feel say she couldn't go to a local discotheque or she couldn't enter a football stadium, because these spaces were really dangerous for her and she was actually told by police when she would when she went there or bodyguards. You know, it's better if you don't come in because it's unsafe. So, we've kind of looked at, you know, worked with the local authorities during this discussion to try to sort of understand, you know, why this is happening and how can we work to change that and what, oh, is this the end? Okay, so, where I so I just going, I'm just going to move to the very last slide if that's okay? And this is just a quick, quick call for solidarity. So, at the moment, as you might know, a lot of institutions in Poland, art institutions are being taken over, by the far right. So, the directors are being replaced by people that are, that are that are the servants of the of the current government, which is very racist, homophobic, very misogynist, in its policies. And I think that there is this kind of warning for us here in the UK, to

really think about where we're heading. And I think there is space in the art world for more collaborations with movements and activists that are operating on the fringes or beyond the artwork. And I think that also kind of starts with looking at ourselves and thinking about, you know, the very kind of problematic notions of, you know, of sort of success of, of competition that are embedded in how the funding is structured, and how we kind of are all the time put in the position of competing with one another. So, that's just a quick, quick presentation for me, and I'm sorry, I overran.

Ulrika Flink 36:01

Thank you so much, Magda for your presentation. And I think that we could move on to the sort of discussion part now. And I would like to remind you all about how you ask questions. So, in Slido, you have a Q&A part. And that's where you put your questions that we then later on, we'll talk about at the end of this discussion part. So, thank you so much, both Adam and Magda. And it's, you know, it's great to see the difference between your practices, because I think that, you know, gives us the idea of the width of social practice, also. But I would perhaps also like to ask you guys, the poll that we've been asking everyone who's taking part of this event, and the poll question was: "can art and the making of art make a difference and strengthen democracy in the realisation of a more interconnected civil society?" The three different options was yes, no, maybe - right now, I would say that "yes", is leading quite a large it's 75%, no 76% actually of you who say "yes" to that question, but Magda and Adam, what would you say to this question?

Adam James 37:29

Huh? Yes *[laughter]* Yes, I think I think it can. Well, I'm wondering whether the question is, not can it but do we want it? Is it the hope? I don't know if it, so I would like it to. I don't know if that's happening. Yeah. Or it is on a small scale, perhaps. But yeah, I don't know, Magda. What do you think?

Magda Fabianczyk 38:00

So, the question is: "can art, and the making of art, make a difference and strengthen democracy? At realisation, right?"

Ulrika Flink 38:07

Yeah.

Adam James 38:09

Yes, you are!

Magda Fabianczyk 38:10

I think it's very much; I think there is very much potential in art to do this. It's, it's, I think it still happens, not as often as it should. And I think there are also, I mean,

one of the problems is that as artists, we very, we operate in a very fragmented way. So, and I think that there is a need for more solidarity and more co-operation with social movements. And I think there was a lot of inspiration as well in social movements to take to take from an import in the in the, in the artwork, for example, you know, looking at the women's strike in Poland, and how they operated on a very decentralised way, and how they managed to activate enormous amount of I mean, hundreds of thousands of women across Poland, even in a small city and politicise them, politicise their voices, and that kind of never happened before. I mean, it didn't happen since solidarity movement, solidarity protests in like 1980s in Poland. So, you know, I think that art also has that has that potential, you can see like migrants in culture, working with migrants organised and how this kind of collaboration is then you know, motivating, mobilising communities against the hostile environment. We've also work with art as well as a kind of way of bringing people closer to the voting processes, you know, to kind of encourage participation in the, in the, in the electoral and the electoral systems. And you know, and I, but I think there is also a need to as well invest in like, invest in migrant leadership in the arts, and see that as well sort of, you know, other kinds of decision-making decision-making positions within the institutions.

Ulrika Flink 40:00

Yeah, I mean, that's, that's really important. And it sort of also goes back to the question of how art projects actually start. So, if we look at your projects, you know, Adam, you were selected by children, which is an interesting and a rare sort of start of a project, but very embedded. But more generally, how do you navigate your own ideas and starting points of an art project, in which, you know, sort of, is it in tune with certain questions in that that has to do with community needs? Or is it a wish to work with a certain topic? How do you start off your projects? That's my question. Maybe you want to start Adam?

Adam James 40:43

Yeah, I think it's kind of as I say, it's become a sort of by-product really, before I was being in the fortunate position, I'm in now, I'm commissioned or approach to work with specific communities. Like, for example, the Tate project before that I would build and kind of create the context of myself. And it was more that I was, I guess I was motivated by, yeah, environments and site specific kind of performance I would want to make with in the beginning, I guess whoever sort of what would want to take part I didn't really make those early works that are funded by the Arts Council with target audiences in mind, I found that was always a bit of a prickly subject really, like, you know, who is this for? And, you know, if I'm targeting any group or groups, there's always the risk of excluding others. So, I just kind of made them in the knowledge that whoever would hear about it through the normal kind of paths would come to that which invariably is, you know, predominantly

white middle class people of a certain age in in the UK. And I carried along that path for a while, and then kind of not giving so much thought about the impact, or the kind of ripples out from those works afterwards. But I did start to kind of notice that what was happening, the more interesting thing that was happening was kind of in the minds and in the bodies of the either the performers or the kind of people that are more directly engaged with the work rather than the sort of secondary audiences. So, I started to think about that notion of what the audience is, and how we kind of, is that necessarily we need an audience? And how do we represent, I guess, kind of more social works? I mean, I think there's a kind of, I going to be picking the words carefully, but maybe a bit of an easy tendency to kind of make social projects and then show the kind of detritus of that as the work, which tends to be like, you know, physical remnants or pictures of people doing stuff, which is, you know, important that we capture that stuff. But for me, that always felt like it fell very short of what the work, where the work actually was. And then more recently, that work led, you know, that working in that way, led me to be approached by institutions like Tate and Wellcome Collection, and The Serpentine Gallery, who, I guess could see perhaps the thing that I was taking for granted, but not see it, but it wasn't really seen, in a way it was I wasn't so guided by that. But they could just see that this way of engaging people through play and putting the making the kind of the participants be the kind of co-authors of the work has a very mutually kind of beneficial outcome. And so, now I'm kind of like led to make works with, with groups in a way often doing what I was finding quite challenging, perhaps to do in the first place, which is to work specifically with a with a kind of group. So it's like a series of happy accidents, I would say, and I continue to be motivated by or see these as opportunities to like, come back, trying to answer this question, which is very, like embedded in, I guess, me trying to have a deeper and more empathetic understanding of the other, and how we, how I bring myself closer to the other, whatever the other group or individual might be. And, for me, role play is a very effective way of doing that. And so, I see each of these projects as a kind of new way of trying to answer that question, really. So yeah, that's, that's my thoughts on that.

Ulrika Flink 44:37

Yeah, thank you. How about you, Magda, how do you sort of approach the starting point of your projects and how does that connect back to, you know, the wishes of a community of participants and sort of a shared idea of what the outcome would be?

Magda Fabianczyk 44:56

So, it starts with a with a with a long period of research, usually. And I spent, for example, in terms of Roma community, I spent one year before we actually came up with the idea of what we're going to do; just having conversations and understanding what the kinds of needs of the local community are, but also what

are the desires, and what the kind of creative elements that people, that people can bring with them into that space. And I think what's quite important as well is to, I mean, why this is important, as well as it's because in order for people to participate, they need to feel that this is relevant for them. And they need to sort of feel emotionally connected with that process. And I think that goes as well, then later with the audiences, I guess, for me, the participant is always, is also the audience. And it's the kind of primary audience very often. So, it's this kind of idea of, I guess, Augusto Boal's "spec-actor", the one that that watches, but also that that shapes that that process. So, I would say research, and there is lots of elements like in experience design, which is kind of borrowed from very commercial, you know, very commercial space. But I think it's useful to kind of look a look into this as well, there are those kinds of empathy mapping that one can do with the community. There are, there are, you know, there are those kinds of emotional journeys, models that we can that we can thresholds, engagement models that we can use, as artists. And I think that they are useful, but they are useful as long as we do it together with the participants. So, we kind of avoid imagining, you know, who, who people are. And I think this, this, this idea of, you know, I think it's very important to remember that, that each of these people they have, they have incredible knowledge and expertise and put that in creative potential, and they bring that into the project. So, I think, when I when I work about when I think about, you know, how I make art, or what I what I'm going to make, I kind of think, how do I connect those dots? So, it comes as an artwork, you know, how can I kind of build on this, and then somehow, the idea for what we're going to do, emerges from that.

Ulrika Flink 47:08

Thank you. Yeah. And one thing that I mean, lately, I've been thinking about is failure, that connected to, you know, a couple of projects that I've been involved with, where, you know, community based or participant based, where you have different ideas about the outcome, and, you know, this sort of feel to put in, or establish a mutual and lasting trust and shared goals, and how you in the product itself, you have to rethink your method. And that becomes very, of course, hard. But also, that's where you really learn and really learn to sort of tend to your own methods, I guess. So, I would like to ask you both about failure and what you learn from it. If you had a case where you found yourself in a situation where you had to sort of let go of certain strategies, goals or ideas within a project. Do you want to start Adam?

Adam James 48:12

Why not? So many, we touched on this other day thinking about this talk. And there's a litany of failures, I suppose, but how they're where the good stuff is. And I hadn't thought of this one until just now, actually, I guess. It's like, very seminal as an experience for me before I was really doing it. I was still at college. In fact, I was

at Royal College, and I was at on a residency. I think I just graduated and had gone back to Paris to do a residency; they have their studio there. And this was in the kind of early beginnings of me trying to kind of tackle and get my head around this like, wanting to make a kind of work that put me in a position of the other somehow as a kind of by-proxy way of me trying to get closer to my absent dad who I'd never met, perhaps all of this work stems from that, by the way. Anyway, and I had, I was in Paris, and I was doing a lot of historic sounds really creepy. I was stalking kind of like the kind of most Charlie Chaplin-like tramps that you could kind of find and Paris is riddled with. Sadly, you know, I'm talking about these real people of course, with its tragedy that these people end up homeless, and in these dire situations but I was using a kind of comedy kind of slapstick appropriation, I suppose, and becoming them through costume and dressing up as them I would start that process by studying them and then make films of me as them and they were kind of silly work. But there was a kind of tragedy through that. Anyway, I there was this guy who he was very he was just like was uniformly brown and greasy and filthy and adopts he was just the dirtiest, stinkiest man ever and poor guy. And he used to hang around outside my studio, this lovely apartment I had, and he would be rummaging around these bins. And I had this weird, terrible idea that I would like he had these fantastic shoes were really there was not much shoe left, it was just as feet poking out of the shoes. And I had an idea that I would ask him for a shoe, or I'd replace his shoes with some new shoes. And then I would take his shoes and use them as the basis for like a sculpture that I would like embellish with Diamante or something. I don't know what I was thinking! Anyway, and I decided that I would approach him about that. And I found I did a sort of translation as best I could in French and I went down, went down, I met this guy and I said, "Hey, I'd love to buy you some shoes and exchange, I'll have your shoes. I'll be back here in a week with some new shoes for you." And he was like the agreed kind of thing anyway, a week past and I bought some shoes. And then I came back, and he was there a week later, and I came down with his shoes. And he just sort of he rejected them and swore at me and threw them in the bin. And I left feeling really ashamed. And I had this, this just this moment of realisation like, yeah, what was motivating this idea in the very first place; who is this for? Obviously, it was, it was for me, really not for this guy. And who was I to think that this person didn't still have, you know, an attachment to those things or a degree of shame about you know, it was just awful. Anyway, from that point on, I really it really made me think long and hard about like, who is this work for that I'm making? And like, where am I? Where do I sit within this? And what's my offer? And yeah, and I suppose that's kind of been at the heart of, I try to as much as possible be, have integrity and be honest and be lay myself there now and everything else I do and make it less about me as an artist and more about the thing that we make together. And I suppose it kind of stemmed from this very awkward, embarrassing kind of encounter with this sweet Parisian tramp. So, there you go.

Ulrika Flink 52:11

Thank you. Yeah, thank you for sharing that. And it is those hard sorts of things that we remember and bring with us. So how about you Magda, do you have a failure that has been important for you in how you work?

Magda Fabianczyk 52:28

I think many, and I think that, it's nice you ask, because I think this is something that is rare. We don't talk about it enough. And but I think I maybe, you know, without going too much into kind of details. I think the recent one might be from about a year ago, I worked on a project where I think I wanted to make it so collaborative, that I was all the time sort of throwing ideas, and I sort of forgot why we do this. And, and the very kind of why the reason for that was that the other person that I was collaborating with, would feel stronger as an artist and would actually become more independent and sustainable. And I think at some point, you know, when I when I realised that I realised that, well, you know, it's not working as I would like, because I'm taking too much control in that process. And, and I just need to withdraw. And I and I just stepped back. And, and, and you know, and, and took a role, more of a sort of maybe a mentorship or a friend, but not necessarily, you know, someone that would then feel like this work that we've produced is mine. And I think the other one as well is, is from a project I've worked on with, again, a kind of community in Poland. It was a neighbourhood where refugees from Chechnya were settled close to another community that was that was thrown out from social housing in the city and kind of put over there in the, you know, in a very kind of badly managed housing that didn't even have bathrooms. And there was a lot of tension, because the kind of the building that were refugees were accommodated, looked very nice from the outside. So, the local community thought that this is a nexus like an amazing space, and they have all this money, and we have nothing. And I've worked for about a year or two years there to kind of bring more understanding and collaboration between the two groups. But also I realised that what I what I didn't do and that was really important was to actually work with an institute - funding institution to create a kind of base and understanding why we do it together and then when we had the final, final event, or like, there was many final events, but the institution wanted to have this one final, in its premises, it took a lot of work to bring that community there because they didn't feel they feel intimidated by that space. And when they actually came, the photographer came to me and asked, "you know, like, they look really shy, would you mind like doing something so it's a little bit like a cool image that we have for our press release?". And it was this moment that kind of killed the project, in a way, because I understood that well, like, there is a lack of understanding what the potential of this this of this group here is. And if we don't have that, then we can't actually sustain this process when I leave. And that's what happened, you know, the process sort of faded away, and we came back to where we are, where we were before. So, so this is this, this is, I think, really important to kind of build

that ground with all the stakeholders and the stakeholders at the very beginning of a process. So, we can build something that is actually meaningful.

Ulrika Flink 56:00

Yes, and that I mean, it's very often that we forgive sort of forget the after life of a participatory projects. And that is, of course, many times on the shoulders of the institutions, who are the commissioners, because there might not be money attached to follow up what happens with certain groups that has been formed from projects. But I know, one thing that is done within the community - LARP community, Adam is actually sort of you have methods and working models in place to think about the afterlife or the what happens after a LARP and to sort of bring all the participants in, do you want to share that with us?

Adam James 56:45

Yeah, I mean, that's really the one of the first things that really grabbed me about it as a as a kind of form. And this isn't true of allLARPs, I meanLARPs are hugely varied, and they range from people running around in a forest dressed as orcs for days to like, more kind of nonverbal abstract things in a small room. But nonetheless, I think that's kind of often current within the Scandinavian kind of model is, they give a lot of thought and attention to this, like post play care. And this really struck me for a whole bunch of reasons. But the simplest form that they do is they're really tight on there being a kind of debrief after a play, which in its simplest form is like a rundown where people sit around in a circle. And we, we have a minute to express our feelings about what that play was like, that LARP was like, and that's a non-hierarchical space where the authors and the designers always speak last, you have the right not to speak, if you wish, and you know that you can speak with without being interrupted. And one as a sort of a bit of a side, but it struck me that's like the play or the LARP or the experience of the art or going to the cinema or the theatre, wherever it is, there's a kind of rarefied moment of like shared knowledge at that point. And at the end, and this is a really simple way of just like collectively delving into that, rather than all sort of dispersing off. So that one thing I felt was really wonderful. But then following on from that, they have a kind of the first thing, they really applaud it and it's great and I think it's a wonderful thing, it sounds maybe throw away, but it's just to have like a party afterwards with everybody present. And again, again, part of the motivation for that is to like level kind of hierarchies, between everybody to kind of shake off any kind of rolls or baggage that's been accrued through the play, or, you know, whatever their activity is, and to kind of, you know, say goodbye to that. And then another thing they do, which is really nice as a kind of, like buddy system. And this really has emerged as a method to out of a need, I guess, to kind of answer that some of theLARPs often are about very hard subjects, and a lot of the kind of understanding or unravelling, or reflection can happen after the LARP itself. You know, I played in a LARP, or I met my now current partner in England, where we

were role playing the gay community in the 80s. And we were living through the AIDS crisis, why would want to play that but it was very beautiful, profound play over a number of days, but it was really it really hit home afterwards. And so, the buddy system that they use is a way where they, the organisers will often have a kind of Facebook groups or some kind of online social space where the people who played and characters can meet and talk and check in and see how they're doing afterwards. How is it unravelling? Is there a kind of bleed into or out of their real life from the perspective of the characters? And also, that can also take the form of just like phone calls and chatting with people. So, it's this kind of prolonged kind of period of care and checking in with one another and making sure we're okay. And it doesn't have to be a heavy burden or a big expense. It can be something quite light touch, I think. But I think that's really valuable as a as a tool or a way of thinking about this after how we deal with it afterwards.

Ulrika Flink 1:00:00

Yeah, definitely. And in many projects, you do run into, you know, participants, and co-creators many years later who had profound experiences. And that only sort of came, they only sort of understood that maybe half a year later, so. So, I do believe in, in thinking more about after care of the life of these projects, we do have a question now in our Slido. So here it goes, "do we need to move beyond the narrowly defined constraint of the visual art infrastructure to achieve more inclusive, productive democratic processes? And if we do, what do we lose?" And what do you think about that Magda? Did you, did you hear it?

Magda Fabianczyk 1:00:55

Yes, what I kind of thought when I thought about, you know, inclusive and productive democratic processes, I immediately thought about the access to funding that actually, for example, the Arts Council England funding is so bloody difficult to apply for. And it's something that, you know, I mean, who can go through this application, even the kind of COVID Support Fund, we are the source in this solidarity syndicate, that was that was a collective kind of process of different artists and activists, it sort of it, it provided that kind of support to one another. So, for example, if there is someone that, that that doesn't know how to write well in English, but still an artist here in the UK, then we would write that application for them, or, for example, you know, pool in and write rights, several applications, and then, you know, show the funding. So, I think this kind of, you know, this sort of elements of destruction are within the art world are very, very much needed. And we can do it as artists individually. I think we have that kind of power if we if we organise. I mean, you know, what we lose? I don't know, you know, like, I mean, I guess it's, you kind of you won't have that many superstars out there, you know, in the artwork, but that's okay. I'd rather, you know, we have a kind of stronger dark matter, I think it was, was Sholette, that, that writes that nicely about the kind of dark matter and how it sustains the few at the top. So, I

think, you know, I would, I would, I would very much kind of you no vote for kind of solidarity and those small actions that disrupt how things are done at the moment.

Ulrika Flink 1:02:42

Yeah, thank you, Adam, what do you think?

Adam James 1:02:47

Yeah, I'm just sort of mulling that over. I mean, I always felt like this kind of public funding model sort of pick up on your point. Yeah, it's very hard to obtain. But I, I sort of felt that, that that model of seeking funding for this kind of work, automatically kind of excluded a very large, it excludes so much of the kind of commercial art that we I mean, people don't tend to get public funding for making paintings or sculptures, I mean, that kind of funding available tends to support projects that feel very broadly and kind of more, more social and, and I only say this, with the knowledge of my previous partner was a painter, and I always felt it was how we both paid for our works to be made was very different, and the impact those works, had and how we measured that impact. And how the impact measurement process kind of through the Arts Council was this like, onerous kind of reflection and evaluation, and the kind of evaluation process of the paintings and the gallery was, "did they sell?", kind of going on a bit of a tangent and rambling I recognise here, but like, I don't know. I feel very fortunate now I live in Sweden as well. And it's become very stark to me the difference I suppose, with some of the way that the work I want to make is funded here but versus how it was funded in England. Yeah, and I don't know. There are we pay higher taxes here and I've kind of realised anyway for myself, whether I like it or not, that by and large, the larger sort of social projects that I would do with institutions, would, you I can't make a living on them. You know, it's impossible, really. I felt that it was I was providing kind of care or kind of social service to my work, which I'm very happy to do, but it felt like I was being paid in the same way as if I was literally a carer or? And so, I decided that actually I need to kind of embrace, maybe not the narrow constraints of visual art, but I don't know, can I kind of have those same desired outcomes through more commercial kind of practice? Or perhaps I am selling things, and I kind of am more in that world? And that really, for me, is as a matter of survival, and for my, if my works to carry on being able to be made, and I don't burn out, you know, I had a wonderful project with Tate for the last two years, and I was pretty close to burnout at the end of that. And so, I don't know, I probably haven't answered the question at all. But those are my rambling thoughts on...

Ulrika Flink 1:05:40

No, don't worry about it. And I, you have touched on one thing that I think both you and Magda, share, and that is, you know, having the ability, like have the chance to work in two different countries and two very different contexts. Do you want to say something about that Magda in the connection to how participant and co-authored

practice is seen both, from your experience in Poland, and you how that connects back to you work in the UK?

Magda Fabianczyk 1:06:18

So, the last project I've done in Poland was, I think 2019. So that's few years, a few years back, I think at that time, it was already quite difficult to make, well, to touch certain, certain problems that might not be that are issues that might not be that comfortable for the local governments, for example, in Bytom, the gallery I worked with, they constantly had issues with the local government, you know, they had, when they staged a film that was opening a discourse around abortion, and the kind of, you know, the kind of underground, they had a protest outside, you know of their gallery and things like this. So, I think it's, it hasn't been easy. But now, I think it's incredibly difficult for artists to, to do work, for example, around anti-racism, to do kind of, you know, to tackle institutional racism, because of the because of the government and how kind of how much control it starts to take over the cultural sector. In terms of, you know, in terms of sort of difference in practices, my own practices. I think I feel equally comfortable here. And they're sort of neither totally, you know, I feel like I'm sort of in between, I think, I think Kathrin Böhm calls it "translocal". And I quite like it, I think that we are very kind of translocal as artists, and we are, you know, we have this ability to make home and embed in in the kind of context and build on this, you know, in various places.

Ulrika Flink 1:08:08

Yeah, I mean I mostly just practising in Sweden, so I don't see myself as translocal. But I am really interested in inviting colleagues from contexts that are perhaps a little bit more problematic to work within than Sweden. So, sharing, organising together, and learning is one of those things that I think it's super important. We have a question from the audience, and I'm not 100% sure if I totally get it, but I will try. So, it says, "all the examples of failure, brought it back to recognising agendas, your own position and reasons for making the work and the importance of empathy within this". So, I really liked this comment or question, I think, perhaps it might more be a comment. But this idea of importance of empathy. How do you see empathy within your practice Adam?

Adam James 1:09:17

Yeah, it's - I see it as kind of, I hoped that it's a sort of, as I say, like a sort of by-product in some way. But so, I tried to explore it kind of in a duality, that it's like a by-product or something that we kind of experience through the play, and then to kind of reflect on what that felt like. But then also would say, I try to kind of wait into the fictional the concept itself. So, I sort of did that by setting up situations where if we were to imagine the play has a kind of outcome, a desired outcome by me, although I never know purely what it's going to be, in order for that to be met or reached, there needs to be some kind of empathic process that people embark

on, yeah. So, it's, yeah, it's a kind of goal and an ambition, I suppose. But often, it fails disastrously and that's fine. I think I'm kind of happy to be told often, by the people that take part in my things that what they what they thought they were signing up to, I thought they would get some experiences, often not what they've got at all. But yeah, I don't know, I hope in some sort of way that like, playing or taking part in these works of mine is, there's a kind of process of like, charging up the kind of players or the participants sort of, and then unwinding them and letting them back loose out into society in some way. There's a kind of questioning of norms and questioning of hierarchies and power dynamics, which they kind of see through this kind of playing in a new position. And it's, I think, it's like trying to kind of start a little empathic metronome ticking away or something. And to see how, what effect that has, I never know, because I don't get to meet these people often afterwards. But yeah.

Ulrika Flink 1:11:29

Yeah, and Magda, we're now I see running out of time, and we'll get to that. But I also would like you to maybe say a few words about empathy and your practice.

Magda Fabianczyk 1:11:40

Okay, I'll be very quick. So, I think for me, empathy is about actionable solidarity. And it has to this element of action is really important. And I think it's also about recognising that we exist within specific power dynamics. And that this, this power dynamics, such as, for example, you know, let's say, misogyny is you know, racism, whatever that might be, that slips into the institutions, and also into our own narratives, we not kind of immune from this, we kind of constantly have to go through this process of anti-racism, and, and so on, and so on. And I think it's to recognise as well when to step away, when to give space to others. Because as much you know, as much as we struggle as artists, and we do, and it's a very difficult space, to operate and to make a living from, there are other artists that, for example, because of their, because of their background, they have even less opportunities. So, it's about you know, it's about sharing, it's about organising, it's about it's about removing yourself once, you know, once, once in a while, yeah.

Ulrika Flink 1:12:51

Yeah, I mean, I think that is very good place to end on empathy, and also understanding of what it actually takes to set up a project where democracy can set up a project where, you know, the, the idea of working on democracy together can actually work in reality. And so today, we've been looking at two very different practices. But I think that bringing together these ideas and notions around social practice, and what is what it takes to, to find a common platform to make change happen, is a complex and long-term engagement. But most of all, it's something that is more, it's needed more in art world. And so, I would like to thank both Adam and Magda for taking the time and, of course, Elisabeth and everyone else involved

in the team to for spending these one, one hour and 15 minutes with us. Thank you very much. And I hope you will check out all the other great episodes of this series. So back to you, Elisabeth.

Elisabeth Del Prete 1:14:15

Thank you so much, Ulrika. And thank you, Adam and Magda. That was really great to hear about the tools and methodologies that you explore through your practices; how LARP uses empathy and helps us put ourselves in other people's position to inform decision making, and Magda, it was great to hear about decentralised democracy as a tool to explore different power dynamics and enact them. So, also, thank you to the audience for participating and for the questions and the comments that you shared in the chat. Ulrika you mentioned the upcoming events from the series. Do please sign up, and I very much hope to see you at the next '*Constellations ° Assembly: How can we move beyond sustainability?*' that will ask, how does the public art community move beyond the notion of sustainability towards a collective regenerative mindset? We will be announcing the line-up of speakers of speakers in the coming weeks via social media, so do sign up to our channels. And we will upload the recording of today's event on our YouTube channel, including captions. So, yes, another huge thank you to our amazing speakers, to The Art Fund, the Arts Council, Barrington Hibbert Associates, the Constellations Patrons and UP Supporters for supporting the programme and to our partners, Flat Time House and Liverpool Biennial, and of course, to the Constellations programming team. Thank you so much and hope to see the next one. Thank you!