

**Live Art UK**  
**Vision Paper**  
**A Question of Live Art**

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[www.liveartuk.org](http://www.liveartuk.org)

## **Live Art - a question of form**

*A light comes on and something happens.* Franko B

Live Art is now recognised as one of the most vital and influential of creative spaces in the UK. Live Art is a research engine, driven by artists who are working across forms, contexts and spaces to open up new artistic models, new languages for the representation of ideas and new strategies for intervening in the public sphere.

Evolving from experiments within 'live' practices by a range of artists in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and particularly the Performance Art methodologies of visual artists, Live Art in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is an ever expanding field that spans time based installation at one extreme and the limits of the theatrical at the other. In between, it touches upon the edges of dance, film and video, performance writing, socio-political activism and the emerging languages of the digital age.

From body based sculptures by Franko B to theatrical enquiries by Forced Entertainment, choreographic experiments by La Ribot, virtual interactions by Blast Theory, sensory journeys by motiroti, geo-political interventions by Platform, sci-art investigations by Kira O'Reilly, sonic experiments by Ultr, club based events by OMSK, and location specific performances by Curious International, questions about the nature, role and experience of art that is 'live' are being asked by a diverse range of practitioners in exciting, urgent and challenging ways.

The term Live Art is not a description of a singular artform or discipline, but a cultural strategy to include experimental processes and practices that might otherwise be excluded from established curatorial, cultural and critical frameworks. Live Art is a strategy to embrace ways of working that do not sit easily within received structures and boundaries, and to empower artists who chose to operate across, in between and at the edges of more traditional artistic forms.

To talk about Live Art is to talk about art that is alive, active and ephemeral, art that is interested in the potential of the body and the possibilities of space and of time; art that invests in ideas of process, presence and experience as much as the production of objects or things; art that wants to test the limits of the possible and the permissible; and art that seeks to be alert and responsive to its contexts, sites and audiences.

Live Art suggests that the cultural values and expectations we place on contemporary practices should not be determined by a reverence to form but by the pursuit of new ideas and new experiences.

### **Live Art UK aims to promote the concept and the practice of Live Art by:**

- **Developing commissioning, curatorial and contextualising initiatives reflecting the diverse range of practices and approaches represented within the Live Art field.**
- **Enhancing the presence and profile of Live Art through dialogues, partnerships and collaborations with UK and international presenters and organisations working at the edges of a range of disciplines.**
- **Furthering the critical and popular profile of Live Art through the development of critical discourses within specialised arts publications and through an increased awareness of Live Art practices and events within other cultural media.**

## **Live Art – a question of artists**

*Live Art offers a haven to artists whose work does not comply with the strictures of traditional designations. Joshua Sofaer*

Influenced by early Performance Artist methodologies where visual artists turned to the body as the site and material of their art, a diverse range of contemporary practitioners continue to be excited by the possibilities of the artist as subject and object and the potency of the 'live' event.

From sculptors and painters, to theatre makers, choreographers and video artists, a gene pool of artists are testing the limits of their practices, crossing each others paths, blurring each others edges and, in the process, opening up new creative forms and new ways of activating audiences.

Live Art is a framing device for a catalogue of approaches to questions of 'liveness' being asked by artists whose work is rooted in a broad church of disciplines but who do want to be held in any cultural boundary or place.

Live Art offers a space in which artists can take formal and conceptual risks, create a context to look at different mediums of expression and new sites for art, explore ideas of process, presence and endurance, and investigate relationships with an audience.

For many artists Live Art is a generative force: to destroy pretence, to create sensory immersion, to shock, to break apart traditions of representation, to open different kinds of engagement with meaning.

Live Art practices have constructed new strategies for the expression of identities beyond the old distinctions of ethnicity, gender and sexuality. For artists negotiating the representation of cultural identity and diversity, Live Art has offered new languages to rewrite dominant postcolonial narratives and sites to embody the lived realities of cultural difference. Artists such as motiroti approach Live Art as a space to break apart genres, cultures and politics; a space to embody experiences and problematise signifiers of difference; and a space for audiences to contemplate their own relationship with 'the Other'.

Artists like Aaron Williamson, whose practice is informed by his deafness, often draw on their physical difference in performance to challenge perceptions and expectations of the body. Bobby Baker employs the performance of everyday domestic tasks, to reveal the hidden depths beneath the seemingly mundane and prosaic and make art that speaks of real lives and lived experiences that are all too often negated and neglected.

For many women, gay, culturally diverse and disabled artists, marginalised within the dominant culture, Live Art has proved to be a potent site, where the disenfranchised and disembodied become visible, where the politics of difference are contested, where complexity is confronted and different ways of being in the world are illuminated.

Live Art breaks the rules about who is making art, how they are making it, where they are making it, and who they are making it for.

With its capacity to shock and subvert traditions of representation, it is no surprise that Live Art practices are embraced by students and younger artists developing their own creative vocabularies and out to change the world. Many high profile, pioneering artists of our times, including the film maker Mike Figgis, opera/theatre director Neil Bartlett, television director Anne Griffin, sculptor Mona Hatoum, and

musician Babybird, have tested new ideas and approaches and cultivated their practices within the 'safe spaces' of experimental performance.

But Live Art is not the preserve of the young. Some artists move in and out of the field throughout their careers alongside their work in painting, sculpture, theatre, writing and film making, whilst for many others, including Anne Bean, Stuart Brisley, Ian Breakwell and David Medalla, Live Art is a lifelong practice.

Live Art raise a number of issues in relation to appropriate support structures for the development of practices and practitioners. The fluid and exploratory nature of Live Art means that there are few career paths or signposts for artists to follow; that traditional approaches to training, research or professional development are often inappropriate; that most institutional frameworks are unable to support itinerant, cross platform approaches; that critical discourses are marginalised; and that its practices and practitioners are often relegated to the sidelines of official culture.

To be effectively nurtured and sustained, Live Art practices and practitioners demand different models and new ways of working - specialised approaches to artistic and professional development; informed curatorial, contextual and critical frameworks; and stable support structures that respond to the different needs of different artists at different stages of their practice.

**Live Art UK aims to support artists working in the Live Art field by:**

- **Developing a more stable and cohesive national infrastructure for the diverse range of practices and practitioners represented within Live Art.**
- **Providing 'cradle to grave' support for artists by facilitating platforms and other appropriate contexts for graduates and emergent artists, and initiating commissioning and curatorial contexts that are representative and responsive to the diverse practices of mature artists.**
- **Supporting the artistic and professional development of emergent and established artists through the provision of specialised resources and informed networking, training, mentoring, contextualising, archiving and IAG (Information, Advice and Guidance) initiatives that meet the needs of artists at all stages of their development.**

## **Live Art – a question of audiences**

*At a time when we're dwarfed by corporations, celebrities and politicians, its no surprise there's an increasing appetite for intimate, interactive experiences. Kate Stratton, Time Out*

By occupying diverse forms and sites Live Art practices have proved to be especially equipped to meet the complexity and sophistication of contemporary audiences' values, identities and expectations.

Live Art questions assumptions and defies expectations about who an audience can be, what they might be interested in, and the means by which they can be addressed.

Live Art has not one audience, but many. Some may experience Live Art as an action in a gallery, others as a performance in a theatre, an occurrence in an unexpected location or a process in which they become involved. There are others who may not be aware that what they are experiencing is Art with a capital A or that they are an audience in any conventional sense of the word. Live Art practices are concerned with all kinds of interventions in the public sphere and all kinds of encounters with an audience.

The audience for Blast Theory's new media based Can You See Me Now? included many young online gamers who were engaging with a work of art as they knew how and not by sitting in the National Theatre or visiting the National Gallery. With Jyll Bradley's floral celebration Fragrant, some came because it was an art event and others to see displays of flower arranging, and in the process received distinctions between popular and restricted culture were rendered meaningless.

The economies of Live Art span an extremities of scales: from the intimacy of a one to one artist-audience encounter in works such as Oreet Ashery's Say Cheese, to the civic spectacle of large scale performance events like Station House Opera's The Salisbury Proverbs and the mass participation of virtual audiences in Completely Naked's Skin/Strip.

There is no subject too great or small, or question too awkward for Live Art to address. From the limits of the material body in performances by Franko B to the minutiae of women's daily lives in the work of Bobby Baker or the political activism of Mad For Real, Live Art is a context in which all manner of ideas about the world around us are not only imagined but embodied and activated in the presence of an audience.

Live Art can provoke, entertain, disturb, seduce, enrage, amuse, repulse, challenge, unsettle, confront, confuse or enrich its audiences, sometimes all at the same time. Live Art can empower audiences who have been neglected or marginalised within the cultural mainstream. For some Live Art might be a place to reflect on their own attitudes, fears and desires. For others it might be a process in which their own lives are made visible, often for the first time.

Live Art offers audiences raw, intimate and immersive experiences, often disrupting distinctions between spectator and participant. Live Art asks us what it means to be here, now. In the simultaneity and interactivity of a media saturated society, Live Art invests in ideas of immediacy and reality: creating spaces to explore the experience of things, the ambiguities of meaning and the responsibilities of individual agency.

Live Art is alert to its audiences and to the conditions of the contemporary. In response Live Art practices and approaches are eagerly pursued by those who

embrace risk, difference and doubt and want their art to be provocative not decorative, immediate not mediated and questioning rather than authoritative.

**Live Art UK aims to further audiences for Live Art by:**

- **Developing curatorial, promotional and distribution models grounded in a commitment to audience development.**
- **Developing strategies to enhance and extend critical and popular awareness of the concept and practice of Live Art.**
- **Developing curatorial and promotional partnerships with UK and international presenters and organisations working across a range of disciplines.**

## **Live Art – a question of presentation**

*Traditional buildings that present the arts will have to adapt to demands both from artists and audiences to rewrite their spaces.*

Robert Hewison, *Towards 2010: New Times, New Challenges For The Arts*.

The diverse, itinerant and volatile nature of Live Art practices and approaches raises a number of issues in relation to questions of presentation.

Live Art occupies not one site or circumstance but many: from the institutional to artist led interventions; from actions in galleries and performances in theatres, to artists working outside of the constraints of official culture, within civic or social spheres, in challenging and unexpected sites, or at the points where live and mediated cultures converge.

The new media based practices of artists such as Blast Theory, the location-specific work of Rona Lee, the socially engaged interventions of Pope & Guthrie, and the political activism of John Jordan all expand the formal and cultural frameworks art is understood to occupy and pose exciting challenges as to how such practices are framed and promoted.

Many Live Art practices and approaches set out to problematise issues of presentation and representation in their form or siting; often disrupting convention, resisting institutionalisation or inviting institutions to consider how to negotiate the conditions of a 24 hour theatre piece, a gallery based performance, a location specific event, a one on one encounter, or a work that only exists in media streams.

The spectrum of Live Art artists and approaches, and the changing expectations and experiences of artists throughout the development of their practice, asks for an infrastructure that can offer different levels of investment in the concept and practice of Live Art and different degrees of engagement with risk: from Live Art programmers, networks and agencies specialising in the development of artistic support structures, to a wider, complex web of presenters for whom Live Art contributes to a broader gallery, theatre, festival or community programme.

At one end of the spectrum the experimental and experiential nature of Live Art needs safe contexts where new artists and new ideas can be incubated and where notions of risk are paramount; contexts such as the National Review of Live Art or Arnolfini's Breathing Space. At the other Live Art has energised, and opened up new possibilities within, some of the UK's major institutions through initiatives such as Live Culture at Tate Modern, Duckie's C'est Barbican and Shunt's collaboration with the National Theatre.

Live Art spans theatre, gallery and new media work suited to more conventional models of touring and cultural circulation, to practices and approaches that are not intended to be 'commodified' or reproduced. Much Live Art is conceived or commissioned in response to the specifics of given contexts, sites or audiences and not necessarily for distribution in any received sense.

Live Art cannot be held in any cultural boundary or place, but belongs to many: from touring productions to location based events, from performances at Tate Modern and the Barbican, to domestic occasions, citywide treasure hunts, interventions into the landscape and frontline activism. Contemporary artists' interest in all kinds of interventions in public life, in occupying the edges as much as the centre, and in having different kinds of conversations with an audience, all contribute to Live Art's increasingly pervasive presence on the cultural landscape.

Live Art suggests ways that artists and presenters alike can explore new approaches to the representation of art and ideas and new ways of engaging with audiences.

**Live Art UK aims to further the presentation of Live Art by:**

- **Developing dialogues and partnerships with Live Art presenters across the spectrum.**
- **Developing networks that facilitate exchange of information, sharing of resources and development of audiences across the spectrum of Live Art promoters.**
- **Developing training schemes and traineeships for promoters.**
- **Developing commissioning and touring models that respond to the diverse nature of Live Art practices and audiences.**

## **Live Art – a question of policy**

*One of the roles of art is to break down borders between different forms, styles and modes of expression. Peter Hewitt, Beyond Boundaries*

Live Art cannot be placed within any singular history, be seen through a disciplinary lens, or be held in any cultural boundary or place. As such Live Art presents a challenge to questions of cultural policy and provision. But it is a challenge that is essential for a healthy culture, and a vibrant cultural policy, to address.

From Forced Entertainment's work across theatre, film and installation (often at the same time), to Barby Asante's subversion of socially engaged practices in projects such as Journey To The East, Live Art erodes artform borders and disrupts cultural models. An erratic and ungainly body that is impossible to define and difficult to accommodate, Live Art is, in many ways, an unruly anomaly that does not fit within received cultural structures and strictures.

But Live Art is synonymous with questions of innovation, of risk and of 'boundary breaking': in charting the territories where new ideas are forged and new ways of being in the world are imagined.

Live Art keeps us alert to our expectations and responsibilities to questions of form, of place, of audience and of cultural value. Live Art explodes conventional aesthetics, foregrounds concepts of interdisciplinarity, and convergence, and erodes distinctions between restricted and popular culture. Live Art questions assumptions about who our audiences are, where they can be found, and how they can be engaged.

The processes and practices of Live Art have been critical to the resurgence of interest in experiential and performative practices and to the adhoc, tactical and itinerant aesthetics of so many contemporary visual artists. Live Art practices continue to influence artists working outside of galleries, theatres and institutions, within civic and social spheres and at the points where live and mediated cultures converge.

Live Art is on the frontline of enquiries into what our culture is and where it is located, who our artists can be and how they are nurtured, what an audience can be and how they can be addressed. The question of how our cultural policies locate and invest in the itinerant and volatile practices signified by Live Art has never been more vital.

### **Live Art UK aims to inform policy and provision for Live Art by:**

- **Serving as a collective voice for the concept and practice of Live Art at local, regional, national and international levels.**
- **Working in dialogue and partnership with ACE Visual Arts Department on the implementation of a national Live Art policy and the development of strategic initiatives that respond to the needs of the Live Art field.**
- **Working in dialogue and partnership with other Arts Council artform and policy departments.**
- **Lobbying for a consistency of policy and provision for Live Art within Arts Council England's regional offices.**

- **Developing dialogues and partnerships with other UK and international networks for innovative, contemporary, performance based practices.**
- **Increasing awareness of the concept and practice of Live Art within other agencies responsible for cultural policy and provision.**

## **Live Art – a question of internationalism**

*Through our programme of live events, we are trying to challenge residual negative perceptions of the UK as staid and retro....audiences are hungry for and open to innovative cultural product. Grainne Brunsdon, British Council, Australia*

The concept and practice of Live Art in the UK is attracting increasing interest from artists, scholars, promoters and audiences around the world.

The concept of Live Art is serving as a model for many international artists and organisations as an approach to the framing, support and promotion of experimental 'live' practices that operate across, in between and at the edges of more traditional artistic structures. Debates and publications around the idea of Live Art as a cultural strategy and critical discourse are taking place within groundbreaking theatre, dance or visual arts environments from Beijing to Siberia, Sao Paulo and Sydney.

Practices that respond to a diversity of cultural contexts, sites and audiences, that want to break apart traditions of representation, and that employ a diversity of vocabularies, all contribute to Live Art's ability to traverse and transcend cultural and geo-political borders.

In the last few years alone, UK artists such as Lone Twin, Station House Opera, Jyll Bradley, George Chakravarthi, Forced Entertainment, Robert Pacitti, Howard Matthew, Blast Theory, Franko B, Aaron Williamson and Curious International, to name but a few, have undertaken major international residencies, been presented in galleries, theatres and events on the international stage, and represented in a diverse range of festivals and symposia from Ars Electronica to Performance Studies International.

Live Art often breaks received models of cultural exchange. Live Art represents, not given, but process based practices that are often grounded in the specificity of their place and space: practices that blur distinctions between spectator and participant, generate interaction and stimulate dialogue. In the process Live Art practices can break down all kinds of borders and enrich our understandings of each other. In recent years Live Art's international exchanges have ranged from collaborations with artists in the Australian Outback and downtown Rio De Janeiro, to projects made with the residents of Shanghai and Bogotá.

Live Art is a vibrant approach to the development of international dialogues and, in many ways, to the kinds of inter-cultural awareness and understanding we need in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Live Art UK aims to develop international exchanges and dialogues by:**

- **Working in dialogue with the British Council and Arts Council on the development and representation of Live Art internationally.**
- **Developing dialogues and partnerships with other UK and international networks for innovative, performance based practices.**
- **Developing curatorial and promotional partnerships with international artists, promoters and organisations working across a range of disciplines.**
- **Serving as a representative voice for the concept and practice of Live Art internationally.**