

**Focus Live Art
Wednesday 5th September 2001, 11am
The Green Room, Manchester**

List of Participants

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|-----------------------|------------------------------------|
| Garfield Allen | Green Room |
| SuAndi | Black Arts Alliance |
| Mark Ball | Fierce Earth |
| Daniel Brine | Live Art Development Agency |
| Paula Brown | London Arts |
| Bryan Biggs | Bluecoat Arts Centre |
| Cathy Butterworth | Bluecoat Arts Centre |
| Sophie Cameron | New Work Network |
| Adrian Challis | Spark Collective |
| Nick Chapman | North West Arts |
| Mark Dey | West Midlands Arts |
| Tamsin Drury | hAb |
| John Dummet | Otiose |
| Bush Hartshorn | Yorkshire Dance |
| Michelle Hirschorn | |
| Nicola Hood (minutes) | Arts Council of England |
| Lois Keidan | Live Art Development Agency |
| John Kefala Kerr | |
| Alex Kelly | Third Angel |
| Laurence Lane | Work & Leisure International |
| Sarah Martin | Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art |
| Caroline Maund | Site Gallery |
| Roland Miller | PIP |
| Qasim Shaheen | |
| Karen Smith | North West Arts |
| Anna Summerford | Northern Arts |
| Topsy Qu'ret | CoLab |
| Rachael Walton | Third Angel |
| Mark Waugh | Arts Council of England |
| Fiona Wright | |
| Suhail Khan | North West Arts |

Minutes

- DB welcomed the participants. He noted that the meeting had come about through an informal national grouping of promoters wishing to address the uneven playing field for Live Art. He thanked the Arts Council and Regional Arts Boards for their support for the initiative. He concluded by introducing the meeting as an opportunity to think creatively about the future of Live Art.
- LK introduced the aims of the day and issues/questions for discussion:
 - How can Live Art artists and promoters be better resourced and empowered to do what they do?
 - How can the perception that the needs of Live Art are at odds with funding agendas be broken down?
 - How can funders be persuaded to see Live Art as a solution, not a problem?
 - How can the flexibility and inherent artform challenges of Live Art be better and more consistently 'placed' within the funding system?
 - How can the arts sector become equipped to deal with hybridity and the sophistication of practices?
 - What strategies might be adopted towards a more even playing field across regional borders?
 - What strategies might be adopted that respect the differing needs of artists and that recognize that “one size does not fit all”?

The potential to develop national partnerships and initiatives **Mark Waugh – Arts Council of England**

- MW outlined the difficulties of working with the structures of the Arts Council of England, and that he was not always able to achieve what he might want. He emphasised that just like artists and promoters, he had to work with the constraints of what is available and accessible. However, working within the funding structures allows for a rigorous negotiation of politics, and the possibility of advocating for the sector.

ACE and RAB mission statements tend to be broadly similar, but the priorities are open to drift and negotiation. This suits Live Art with its absence of fixity, and its product which is open to disappearance. The product is excitement and engagement, not “capital”.

MW outlined the experience of developing the *Shooting Live Artists* scheme with the BBC and developing commissions with Studio of the North. He discussed the process of sharing values between partners, then looking to how those values might fit with each partner organisation’s corporate aims, and negotiating where corporate aims don’t match the shared values. He suggested that working in partnership was of increasing importance to ACE’s approach.

MW referred to the quality of Live Art practitioners' funding applications and their clarity and sophistication when discussing work. With Live Art now placed within the Visual Arts Department of ACE, the quality of Live Art applications is impressive compared to those from other visual arts practitioners and this means Live Art is looked to as best practice.

MW cited Fierce Earth's *New Audiences Programme* project as an example of using Live Art practices to explore how non-art audiences perceive the arts are sold to them, and the sophistication of the consumer. He also discussed The New Art Gallery, Walsall working with La Ribot, and the importance of the gallery adapting its practices to allow the public permission into the unsettling and volatile aspects of Live Art. MW concluded by suggesting Live Art is well placed to ask the questions:

- What are the arts?
- What is the philosophy of the arts?
- Do the arts need to engage with radical difference?
- Who is the public for the arts?

A vision for a national network of artists Sophie Cameron – New Work Network

- SC introduced the work of the New Work Network. It was initiated in 1995 to enable practitioner networking; for sharing of ideas; to facilitate support; to advocate for practitioner needs; and to provide a forum within which the voice of the artist is integral. SC highlighted that NWN recognises that its development as a network needs to happen at an appropriate pace.

SC outlined NWN's aims and events profile, and highlighted that this was an ideal forum to encourage activity and input from the participants of the meeting. NWN is currently working towards a vision for a national network of artists. It is a national and inclusive organisation, both artist and sector led. It aims to develop positive links with funding bodies, and is a small fixed-term funded client of ACE.

SC highlighted a few of NWN's recent activities - including:

- *Live Late Review*. Peer assessment events linked to festivals.
- *The Chemistry Experiment* with Arnolfini Live. A series of debates about collaboration.
- Collating information for the sector.
- Specific professional development training on areas such as documentation, administration and marketing.
- Mentoring scheme for artists in eXpo (EMA-funded).
- Advocacy.

- NWN presence at festivals (building up the profile of NWN and increasing links with artists).

NWN is trying to create links and generate information and skills exchange for artists working within specific regions by creating regionally specific NWN meetings and then encouraging information and skills exchange between artists working within different regions. NWN aims to gather information from artists, identifying their specific professional development needs and use this information as a basis from which to form national strategy for creating relevant support structures for artists. SC highlighted the point that what is important to focus on within the network are the opportunities for members to be proactive within NWN.

- LK introduced two case studies which had been selected as a means to stimulate discussion. Both case studies were drawn from outside the participating regions to provide a broader national context for discussion.

Case Study One

Live Art Development Agency and London Arts

Paula Brown – Combined Arts Officer, London Arts

PB addressed the following points:

- Why London Arts decided to delegate responsibility to an independent agency and what their expectations were.
- How Live Art Development Agency sits in relationship to other schemes in London Arts.

In 1998, in response to the diversity of practice represented within the field of Live Art, LA produced a brief outlining the need to identify a London based agency with both a national and international agenda. LA recognised that an independent resource with dedicated individual expertise would complement the work carried out by LA and provide enhanced and more focussed facilities for Live Art practitioners. The tender for an agency was awarded to Keidan/Ugwu to set up the Live Art Development Agency and they became a Fixed Term Funded client of LA.

The Live Art Development Agency provides advice and mentoring schemes for artists and since it has been formed the provision for Live Art in London has strengthened and the agency has worked closely on project development and produced stronger, more realisable projects and developed the audience for Live Art. In partnership with LA, the Live Art Development Agency established a bursary scheme for artists in 1999.

Specific strategic priorities for the Agency include;

- The Higher Education sector – strengthen Live Art education structure.

- Development and advocacy through the generation of critical debate.
- Supporting artist development through the bursary schemes
- Supporting new work
- Raising the profile of Live Art
- Cultural Diversity

PB positioned these priorities in the wider context of the needs of individual artists and other initiatives within London Arts such as the Arts Centre programme fund that supports innovative programming at centres/venues i.e. Hoxton Hall. PB also highlighted the absence of dedicated spaces for the exhibition/performance of Live Art. She recognised that there is a weakness in venue infrastructure in London – where it seems many are not willing or able to programme Live Art. PB noted that in addition to addressing these issues, Live Art Development Agency provides a key source of information to LA

Lois Keidan and Daniel Brine – Live Art Development Agency

The Live Art Development Agency has an excellent relationship with LA and this partnership has proved to be a successful model for subsequent LA initiated agencies. They operate as an independent organisation but their priorities and ethos are in keeping with those of LA.

The Live Art Development Agency's position is as a safe and 'intermediary' space that is half way between a funder and a promoter. From this position they are able to retain an independence and an impartiality and are also able to provide information and advice in both directions (to the sector and to the funders).

The Live Art Development Agency receive a relatively small annual grant but manage to strike a balance between levels of funding and levels of expectation. By working strategically and in partnership with other organisations the Agency's relatively small amount of income does not limit the scope of their work, but it is important to signify, in relation to other models of delegation, that expectations must be met by appropriate funding levels.

The Live Art Development Agency's relationship with LA is both strategic and mutually dependent - the work of the Agency has value because of the work of LA and vice versa. Delegation does not mean funders washing their hands of responsibility.

Case Study Two Fierce Earth and West Midlands Art

Mark Ball and Mark Dey

- MD noted that four/five years ago West Midlands Arts considered the question of how to populate an unpopulated landscape of Live Art within the

WMA region. MD chose not to create and work with a Live Art strategy but rather to work within the agendas of the WMA corporate aims of:

- Access
- Creative ambition
- Profile of the Arts
- Resources

These aims were analysed in relation to Live Art and the question arose as to why audiences were not engaging with interdisciplinary practice. To address this, WMA adopted a two pronged approach:

- i) The question of venue. Where would an audience go to view live work? Which venue would be able to host touring shows? There was the need to identify a venue that WMA already had a relationship with and that covered a diverse area of practice. It needed to be one that they were already supporting covering a diverse area of practice and have the opportunity to work across several platforms. For these reasons Warwick Arts Centre was selected.
- ii) The question of support agency. The need to identify an organisation that would enable and encourage artists' practices to develop and grow. Fierce Earth was selected as it already had a history as a promoter and working with Live Artists. Fierce Earth was actively involved as a promoter, hosting an annual festival, and providing advice for artists.

The first activity was to conduct an audit of activity within the region to act as a benchmark of the areas of activity. The relationship between Warwick Arts Centre and Fierce Earth then generated an area of focus and critical mass within the region. It provided an arena for artists to discuss their practice and also offered networking opportunities and teaching around Live Art and in turn encouraged artists to stay in the region and develop their practice.

Fierce Earth aims:

- Provide basic information and advice service for artists and students.
- Provide professional developing schemes for artists (mentoring)
- Provide specific support to Warwick Arts Centre with programming and marketing advice.
- Facilitate a Higher Education promoters group for those operating within the region.
- Raise the profile of Live Art
- Develop venues/promoters/programmes and partnership programming
- Offer shadowing opportunities
- Audience development which is interested in the hybridity of practice

How can we work collectively towards building a more effectively resourced and empowered Live Art sector across the country?

Attendees were asked to identify the key challenges facing the Live Art sector from their experiences as artists, promoters, funders or from the perspective of their specific regional needs. However rather than simply cite key challenges, many attendees could not resist the temptation to debate some of the points being raised:

- There was a great deal of discussion around the issue of audiences. The issue of the need to engage and sustain and develop an audience for Live Art and the inherent difficulties in relation to the complexity of the diversity of practice within the field of Live Art.
- BB raised the issues surrounding critical debate and who was writing about Live Art and therefore who was informing Live Art.
- RM commented that is the audience just a consumer? What is an audience and is it necessary to define an audience just for funding opportunities?
- SA suggested that there is the need to address the need for a 'public' audience as the Live Art audience is currently made up of peers, ex-Live Art students and it is perceived to have a very internalised audience.
- Third Angel commented on the importance of establishing and maintaining a dedicated space for Live Art all year round.
- The point was raised that there is the need to provide R&D funding and allow artists more time to develop their practice.
- Sustainability of an artist's career and the financial issues and challenges are so high.
- Higher education was seen as fostering a lack of awareness of contemporary art practices and advocacy at a national level of key Live Art practitioners is currently inadequate.
- AC raised the issue of the relationship between Live Art practice and the funding system and the feeling that the need to demonstrate a product often means that difficult to fund ephemeral work is not prioritised.
- TD felt that as there is currently a lack of clarity surrounding the support for Live Art within the RABs it proves difficult for artists to locate funding and establish relationships with a funding body.
- There is also the issue of scale surrounding the funding of projects in relation to the scale and size of the work, the funding allocations need to be more flexible in order to address the scale of the production.

Key Challenges

Out of these extensive discussions the key challenges identified were:

- Expertise and Advocacy within the funding system and beyond.
- The question of higher education
 - Critical/culture frameworks
 - New artists/audiences
 - Beyond existing structures
 - Training/development
- Enabling artists to be artists
- Terminology/public perception
- Recognising, qualifying and maintaining ‘quality’.
- Nurturing innovation
- Implications of perceptions of exclusivity

- Audiences
 - What?
 - Who?
 - How?
- Representation strategies
 - To audiences
 - To the system
 - To ourselves
 - Consensus/Diversity
- without institutionalising
 - Networks
 - ‘Touring’
 - Internationalism
- Sustaining Careers
 - Longevity (artists and promoters)
 - Cradle to grave
 - Emergent/mature artists
- Spaces/Places
 - Where?
 - How ?

- Context
- Consistency

- Process VS Product
- Nature/Diversity of practice
 - form
 - approaches
 - needs

DB and LK summarised the above list of challenges as follows and invited attenders to divide into regional groups to look at some or all of the challenges and to discuss possible solutions in relation to their own practice, their region and the wider sector.

- Audience Development
- Critical debate
- Venues
- The question of Higher Education
- Branding of Live Art
- Research & Development
- Sustainability of careers

Regional groups, report back and summary

Northern Arts

- The lack of a Live Art Festival within the region was discussed and therefore the absence of a context within which to frame a consortium festival.
- The possibility of bringing Live Art from outside the region in order to develop practice within the region.
- The need to establish links and generate networks with other organisations.
- The need for continuity.
- The need to develop an infrastructure for Live Art within the region without placing all the emphasis on one organisation i.e. Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art.
- The importance of building, developing and maintaining networks.
- The need for RABs to talk together internally.
- There is a specific geographical problem of connecting artists within the region itself and this needs to be addressed.
- NA to hold a meeting with artists, promoters and venues and organise a series of platform events to introduce Live Art to the region. NA will be holding another meeting to discuss these points further.

North West Arts

- Retaining artists within the region and looking at H.E resources within the region
- The strengths within the region are centred around producers and promoters
- There has also been a shift away from the live and move towards the digital Live Art crossovers which in turn has brought in new audiences.
- The need to hold another meeting was recognised and it was agreed that NWA would host a region specific meeting.

Yorkshire Arts

- Is there a Live Art audience?
- The profile of the sector needs to be raised which will in the long term effect the attitude of the press
- The relationship with the funding body needs to be addressed (it was noted that the Combined Arts Officer within YA has not been replaced, whereas the Drama Officer was replaced immediately).
- The issue around devolving funds into local authorities was discussed how this would effect funding for the arts as this was not a statutory requirement
- Utilise independent spaces i.e. Site Gallery and the fact that they could raise funds for commissions etc.
- YAB will look into the possibility of hosting a further meeting

LK and DB extended thanks to all of those responsible for organising the event and to everyone for attending.