

## **The Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure inquiry into Inclusion in the Arts of Working Class Communities**

### **Brief Introduction**

1. This submission of evidence was prepared by Sara Greavu (Public Programmes Co-ordinator) and Matt Packer (Director) of the Centre for Contemporary Art Derry-Londonderry.
2. The evidence below is aligned to CCA's business strategy for the period 2014-2015.

### **Preface**

3. As a key arts organisation in Northern Ireland delivering new and alternative models for artistic engagement with communities and individuals, CCA Derry-Londonderry welcomes the chance to submit evidence to the committee on social inclusion in the arts. One of the core goals outlined in our business plan for 2014-1025 and beyond is to expand our outreach programme with the priority of addressing poverty, social exclusion and equality in a sustainable way
4. The established model of community arts workshops that operate toward highly determined outcomes has been a tried and tested approach for arts organizations in the recent past that are looking to engage working class communities. While we recognise the merits in such projects with clearly identifiable outcomes, we also feel that it doesn't guarantee the best parameters for meaningful exchange - missing opportunities for the participating communities and the artists involved.
5. Based on our experiences, we would like to propose that the committee consider the approach of developing projects with long-term participations and those that are more open to results being shaped by the process of participation. The approach of artists' residencies as a way of 'embedding' artists within a community - allowing the mutual development of trust and knowledge-sharing between artist and participants - is a fundamental step toward any meaningful exchange.
6. CCA is among a handful of national and international organizations that are developing new forms of community engagement - from Create Ireland who have a track record of delivering exceptional collaborative arts projects in social and community contexts to The Showroom, London who have commissioned a range of projects with the under-represented and excluded immigrant communities in their neighbourhood and Casco in Utrecht, in the Netherlands who undertake integrated living-research projects on a long term basis, embedded within the community.
7. Projects initiated by these organisations see internationally recognised artists working with communities and community groups. Their projects are, at times, speculative and do not always have certain or highly instrumentalised outcomes. It is the process and the practice that are prioritized over all

else, together with the belief in artists' ability to expose new ways of seeing the world.

8. Unfortunately, this type of arts practice is restricted under current Arts Council funding structures, which don't allow for longer term artist residencies or more process-driven forms of artistic engagement. In the last two decades, residencies have become key to production of art around the globe. They offer artists and cultural practitioners the opportunity to temporarily move to a new context, focus on their practices, and build professional networks. The fact that no such programme of support for longer term artist residencies exists in Northern Ireland results in cutting the art community off from artistic peers internationally.
9. CCA is participating in a steering group around engaged art practices convened by researcher Sarah Tuck and ArtWorks NI and we would urge the committee to consult with this group. One key goal of this network is to address the deficit in 'socially engaged' practices in the North and provide supports for artists to test out ideas with a community and ensure that the community is a partner in the realisation of a project. It is also concerned with the ways in which communities might exchange information and insights about working with artists and how this could be supported.
10. While CCA has a proven track record of initiating projects that speak to social need, we also have some concerns about the increasing instrumentalisation of the arts as understood by local authorities. By instrumentalisation, we refer to asking art to perform a specific, instrumental function (for example, 'prevent suicide' or 'tackle social inequality'). Existing funding structures increasingly ask us to demonstrate how our programme will achieve goals such as this and we are wary of the claims this kind of agenda forces us to make in terms of what the measurable short-term results of our programmes can be. It is also important that arts institutions can explore ideas and areas of investigation that are not instrumentalised to tackle social and economic need in very direct ways. Art is not a multi-purpose tool. Art has its own set of histories, legacies and critical issues that are important to respect in order to foster the most ambitious arts practices into engaging with specific communities.
11. Below is information about CCA and a summary of some of the socially engaged projects we have initiated over the last year, identifying social need and/or tools for community and individual sustainability and addressing these concerns in concrete ways.

### **General Scope of Activities**

12. The Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA) fosters a wide range of artistic, curatorial, and critical practices through five collaborative and process-driven streams: research and production, exhibition-making, public programmes, publishing, and residencies. Situated in the Cathedral Quarter within the historic city walls, CCA addresses both communities of place

and communities of interest, embedding the international in the local and engaging the local in the international.

13. Our mission is to give emerging artists and new curators the best possible tools for developing internationally successful careers in contemporary art, and to offer audiences access to the most relevant and engaging art practices of our times. We give special consideration to those artists and projects with a connection to our region.
14. CCA is the only not-for-profit visual arts organisation situated in the historic city centre. Our fully accessible facilities are situated between the walled city centre and the socially isolated and economically deprived Triax area, which includes the Fountain and Lower Bishop Street. The area remains an interface between divided local communities. Our location -- between a communally isolated residential enclave and the commercial city centre -- gives us a unique opportunity to connect with people who live near us and those who use the city centre for commerce.
15. Seeking to connect this peripheral location with the international art scene and to give high-impact opportunities to practitioners in the early phases of their careers, the CCA offers significant commissions, major international group exhibitions, and residencies in Derry~Londonderry~Doire and internationally. We have also initiated a publishing stream to disseminate significant voices and perspectives and connect with ongoing international discussions.
16. Derry~Londonderry~Doire is one of the UK's youngest cities with 40% of its population under 25. There is a need for innovative and deeply engaging contemporary art projects that are conceived and delivered with an appreciation of long-term impacts on young participants as they develop into the community leaders of the next generation. Through our public programme, we seek to inspire children and young people in the area through an engagement with leading artists who work with radical participatory models of culture. These inspiring early experiences may have long term, beneficial impacts on our community.
17. CCA sees the importance of working closely with the educational sector at primary, secondary and further/higher levels, as a way to build community relationships, reach children and young people from areas of economic and social deprivation, and bolster the existing visual arts curriculum by relating it to real-world, contemporary art practices.
18. Our public educational programmes are focused on addressing poverty through an engagement with local schools from the Triax area of high social and economic deprivation as well as tackling social exclusion and equality through targeted engagement with minority communities including the Polish community and the Irish language community as well as adults with physical and learning disabilities.
19. Just as our exhibition programme is thematically organised, this past year dealing with social issues around work and next year addressing new articulations of the politics

of the body, our public programme digs down into the theme and explores it from new angles. Given the politically engaged nature of the themes, this will necessarily include a detailed examination of issues of equality, exclusion, and justice. It reflects our concern with not simply increasing numbers, but with increasing 'dwell time' within the CCA, thereby fostering a more meaningful engagement with the work.

### **Community Outreach and Engagement**

20. Our schools programme sees six P4 classes (approximately 150 children) from five schools from a range of backgrounds (Controlled, Maintained, Irish language and Integrated) visit the CCA each exhibition for workshops that draw out and investigate some formal or thematic elements of each show. This is a long-term engagement of schools from across the city with particular care being taken to include those schools in communities closest to us within the Triax area. The workshops draw out elements of exhibiting artists' concerns and adapt them into accessible, innovative activities for children.
21. Over the course of the school year, each participating class has a chance to experience several different exhibitions of contemporary art. The programme encourages reflection and discussion on themes encountered in the work. Participants go on to test out new materials and techniques in related hands-on workshops. The emphasis is placed on sparking children's imagination and encouraging them to take creative risks.
22. Participating schools are Long Tower PS, Fountain PS, Nazareth House PS, Gaelscoil Éadain Mhóir, and Oakgrove PS.
23. Over the last two years, we have initiated a number of residencies and engaged projects, two of which are outlined below. Both of the following projects were conceived of with the artist Andrea Francke, the first acting as a pilot and the second developing Francke's ideas further:
24. The first project was part of our inaugural exhibition of 2013, *The Grand Domestic Revolution GOES ON*. In an investigative system of exchange, this socially engaged commission offered free childcare for two-year-olds in an environment created by London-based Peruvian artist Andrea Francke and staff from our local SureStart (Sure Start Edenballymore). Cutting across the communal divide, families from The Fountain and Bishop Street were invited to participate. In return the parents and caregivers using the service told us about domestic conditions. Francke's long-term, socially engaged way of working is something that our primary funders cannot support to the extent necessary, since they are focused on projects with immediate outcomes.
25. Following on from this, a grant from the Big Lottery allowed us to commission Francke for a further project.
26. CCA Culture Kids - A Play Laboratory was devised to meet a number of different goals: It was hoped that Culture Kids would serve as a pilot or a model for future long term, embedded work with communities and artists. We sought to develop and consolidate relationships with our neighbouring

communities built during artist Andrea Francke's previous work on Invisible Spaces of Parenthood and during our ongoing schools programme. We also wanted to test out models of sustainability embedded in Francke's practice and create situations where kids were empowered to create and control their own methods and materials of play.

27. Recruitment was carried out through the local schools that we work with on our established education programme. These schools were chosen in the first instance in order to reflect the demographics of the city and to target social need. We selected a mix of Controlled (generally Protestant/Unionist), Maintained (Catholic/Nationalist), Irish Language and Integrated schools. All of these, apart from the Integrated school, are in our immediate proximity and they rank high on indices of social and economic deprivation, including, in particular, the number of pupils receiving free school meals and those on the Special Educational Needs register. Further places, when available, were filled through an open call from our database and through our local networks. This strategy was an attempt to ensure a mix of participants rather than working solely through established arts networks that may only reach families who already value the arts and may not reach young people from socially deprived backgrounds.
28. Each of the sessions (Architecture and Construction, Hospitality and Cooking, Urban Ecology and Publishing) reached 12 to 20 children and included lead artist Andrea Francke, respondent artists selected by her, and local respondent individuals/organisations.
29. CCA Culture Kids represents a model of practice that foregrounds a Do It Yourself ethos of self-sufficiency and a seamless integration of art practice and learning. Francke uses 1960s and 1970s DIY manuals as a starting point to explore practices of building, exploring, collecting and modifying instead of buying playthings. CCA was interested in developing this idea of how the DIY attitude questions the uniqueness of the expert's expertise, and promotes the ability of the ordinary person. It can also blur the lines between creator and consumer by constructing a social network that ties users and makers close together. The project sees children not as receivers or receptacles of information, but as empowered producers of design and knowledge
30. Each of the intensive two-day sessions ended with a celebration of the work of the young people, a small party and a chance for the young people to interact with their own and other parents and discuss and evaluate the work that they did.

### **Impact and Legacy**

31. The first session, Construction for Children, can be used as an example of the impact and legacy that the project has had. This session was focused on architecture and construction and foregrounded sustainability on a number of levels. Andrea worked with performance architect Lamis Bayar to introduce Gridbeams, a modular construction system that can be used to build functional small structures and furniture. These structures can be disassembled and new structure built with the

same modules. CCA worked in partnership with Derry's Fab Lab, a community resource with laser cutter, 3D printer and CNC router, to create the modules. Engaging a local partner in the Culture Kids project brought new users to the Fab Lab and ensured that participating children could continue to access the Gridbeam units for future, independent building projects. The kids learned principles of design and construction and then built their own small structures or pieces of furniture over the course of the two days. Starter kits of modules and bolts were given to each child to take home (please see images below).

32.       **The project built on and developed existing relationships with local school children, in the main from the Triax area.**
33.       **-developed the cognitive skills of the participants including analysis, interpretation, and problem solving.**
34.       **-engaged other members of these children's families**
35.       **-built relationships between young people from neighbouring schools across class and community divides who may not have had opportunities to engage with one another previously**
36.       **-created opportunities for promising artists to develop their practice.**
37.       **-linked our local community to international artistic practices, thereby addressing our core ethos of embedding the international in the local and engaging the local in the international.**
38.       **-partnered with local individuals and organisations who shared the concerns of the project.**
39.       **-used sustainability as a core value.**

### **Conclusions**

40.       The problems to be addressed within working class communities are inter-generational in nature, and require solutions that tackle inequality in concrete, economic ways. In terms of the role of the arts, they require a similar long-term commitment to building genuine engagement that can bring about positive change. Arts organisations that are already delivering essential programmes of this nature need to be supported on a durational basis, recognising that long-term problems require corresponding long-term solutions. In all of this we shouldn't lose sight of what art is actually for and capable of achieving.
41.       The case studies above point towards some of the advantages of working toward alternative models of thorough engagement between artists and communities.

42. Organisations that commission artists to work with communities need funding structures that allow for longer term and process-driven approaches of arts practice.
43. There is a need to create the conditions that allow artists and communities to meet on mutual terms in order to address and rectify the power imbalances inherent in many community art contexts which, in the long term, act as a barrier to the sustained involvement of working class communities.
44. The agenda of instrumentalising art as a soft tool of social change creates difficulties for artists, arts organizations, and participating communities. Such an instrumentalising agenda propagates a restrictive understanding of art's 'purpose' and implicitly stigmatises the communities addressed.