

NO JOBS IN THE ARTS

Creative Conversations

A Transcript of a short audio file to replace a written evaluation.

25/07/2022

[Start of Transcript]

Jo Wheeler (JW): In Spring 2022, No Jobs in the Arts ran a programme of initiatives to test different approaches to supporting early-career creatives. This audio piece is based on a series of recorded conversations with 12 of the artists most involved in the programme, to hear from them about the barriers they have experienced in accessing a career in the arts, what kind of support they need to address this, and what they gain from taking part in this programme. No Jobs is run by Ryan Boulton and Charlie Collins, and over the course of 5 months they supported 75 artists in various ways including mentoring, placements, residencies, artist and curatorial permissions and networking events. To give you a taste, we'll start by hearing from artists who took part in one of those events, the Fringe of Failure, held at LCB Depot in Leicester in March, part of the UK New Artists city takeover event.

Anonymous Artists: I was so nervous. I thought it was gonna be completely different. I thought I'd be sitting in a corner drawing by myself.

Jo Wheeler: And it's really not that. Do you want to describe what you've been doing this morning?

Anonymous Artists: It's not that. Sitting with other creatives either talking about their experience in the arts whilst doodling, drawing together and.

We've had a lot of conversations about professional practice. How you build that network and those connections...

...how you should price artwork, icebreakers, building towers.

There's a really good mix out there going on in sort of, conversation, and networking and exploring.

It's all been very playful and very intuitive, I dunno, it's nice to get in touch with your inner child. To be making for the sake of making. And there's no pressure involved. It's refreshing.

It brought back that sense of community, that playfulness that can sometimes be missing on your own.

I think what they're doing here that's better than a lot of the stuff I see, is they've done this right in front of the door. You know, if this is here throughout the day, that's how you get people involved. It's not so much people aren't proactive who aren't involved in things, it's more they're worried they can't do it.

It brought a studio like environment and we'd all said the same thing, we miss having a studio, we miss having this communication, dialogue, talking to each other and then spent all this time with covid and I just thought it was a really rich process in terms of learning what other people think failure might be.

Failure is such a sort of niche thing to sort of sit and come and explore it. Because it's the sort of thing where perhaps you never sort of open up to that.

I think that's the core of it. It's getting people in a room together, opening it up to the public, and just going yeah this is here, free to use, this is where you can come and it's a space where you can feel listened to, heard, able to talk, able to share, able to fail, and make and whatever you want to do.

Jo Wheeler: No Jobs exists because Ryan and Charlie both faced barriers to accessing a career in the arts themselves. In order to tailor support, they were keen to find out what kind of challenges these early year creatives were experiencing.

Anonymous Artists: A lot of people end up, when they actually come into the creative industries, giving up because it's, you know, competitive and difficult to get opportunities and difficult to keep yourself motivated.

Yeah, I really have found the creative industry to be quite isolating. I wasn't very welcomed by the community as such, like people just being competitive.

Yeah, getting someone to recognise your work is tricky, that's hard because it's so saturated half the time. So the big barrier is just knowing people, that horrible networking thing.

Try and work your way into like this art world, but unless someone gives you an in and says what about this, it's really difficult to push for something you don't know exists.

We were also saying everyone finds art in a different way, so nobody's path to being an artist is the same.

Money in the art world is almost not spoken about, like how artists survive, and being like a working class creative as well, I don't have that support behind me from family or whatever.

You need to be able to let go of some stress and just sort of play and if you're sort of managing eight jobs and thinking about money and rent and all the rest of it, that can be very hard.

Just graduating, no one warns you for the fact that structure is completely gone, and all of a sudden no one cares if you do or don't do something.

I loved every bit of my degree and I think all of the things I did in that time were really helpful, but you leave uni and you're like okay I don't know how to write an application, I don't know how to find good resources. You need that support to start before you leave because otherwise you're on your own.

In the start of second year of uni lockdown and like covid happened and that meant it was very difficult to connect with artistic people and stuff because I had to move back home for a bit. So that was massively disruptive.

It would be nice to pull us guys into the culture a bit more, but Grimsby as a place, nothing happens here, this is why your young people are moving to London and Nottingham and I don't blame them but because of that we don't have anything.

Jo Wheeler: No jobs wanted to ask early career creatives across the programme, what support they needed to help address the barriers they were experiencing? They made a postcard inviting a response to one simple question; what do you want? 89 replies were collected back, to be shared on the website. I also asked the artists I was interviewing for their thoughts to this question.

Anonymous Artists: I think it would be great to have some sort of mentoring scheme where you could be paired with maybe a more established artists, just to have someone to look at your work and be like, what about this?

Any form of mentoring, especially anything where the person can feel like they're learning skills, through like doing things practically.

Critiques, when you leave uni, you lose them, you lose those groups, just sitting down and going... I've got this idea; so seeing more of that outside of universities, for a wider audience.

What I've always wanted is to find like minded people, who maybe work in a similar way that I do, who would like to share, like a studio, or do like a residency somewhere and being able to have dialogue.

Workshop spaces, you know, a directory of, if you want to do woodworking or resin casting, here is the rate and here is the number to call, paid opportunities as well, for artists from different backgrounds.

Money and space, having space, but I always feel like access to space lead back to funding. And then the other thing would be like community,

Ongoing conversation and support. Because I think like building that relationship with Ryan and Charlie, I don't think I would have felt as kind of safe to take risks.

Jo Wheeler: So what did the artists gain from being involved, and how did this impact their practice?

Anonymous Artists: I mean, it was all new and never done anything like that.

So just all of it was very like eye opening, and someone who's like an early career creative, you're like a sponge, and you're just trying to absorb everything, and start to like pull all of that together, to kind of almost in a way create, like your own persona and how you would fit into these institutions,

It was nice to know the process of how open calls work, from the inside, kind of thinking about what I was looking for; this made me think about how I'd want to present myself, if I was gonna apply for an open call,

It's been really interesting to be suddenly kind of like exploded into a big space. It's kind of pushed me because I have a lot of ideas of things that never fully kind of come to fruition. So it's definitely given me a different perspective on what I can do.

The connections and the confidence has been a big one, getting a group together and realising that everyone sort of feels the same way that everyone's facing different barriers in a lot of ways. So yeah, it's been the ability to connect with new artists, young artists really, has been huge.

Just working with others and like, not just being me, so actually being able to bounce ideas off other people, and to have other people take over some parts, so I didn't have to do everything. It was really, I really enjoyed working with others, which I kind of thought that I didn't.

People used to tell me that like the arts community is really important. I felt like I didn't really quite get why that was so important. I'll see a lot of artists that kind of go through these ups and downs, they will be like this is normal, like you're fine like this is part of the process. We've all been there, so they normalise it, and also they keep you sort of in the loop and connected.

It's all been new. I've never done anything like this before, and it's been nice seeing how it all works, especially working with like a community as well, it's made me want to keep doing it.

I guess it's really different. Because I've set the parameters of what I wanted to do with that. I think it's just been a really valuable opportunity. It's really just flipped kind of what I was doing. And I feel like, it's just solidified what I want to do in terms of my art practice.

I'm applying for jobs as a programme assistant in other organisations. I also applied for a studio a couple of weeks ago as well. Now I know the channels of where to look for creative jobs. Obviously, there's always doubt in my mind, just like, get something it's a bit less all over the place sometimes, but also the amount of like joy and enrichment that I've experienced, even just at this kind of like entry level job, has been way more than I think I could in any other sector.

Jo Wheeler: And that feels a good place to pause. There are very clear challenges to making a career in the arts, but rewards too, let's make access better. So opportunities are not just available to those with the privilege of connections and money. This work is really vital in addressing the lack of diversity in the art sector. Firstly, we have to actively reach out to early career creatives who come from a full range of backgrounds and perspectives, and have conversations; to ask, and listen, and respond - and, acknowledge these four things that I feel No Jobs in the Arts' recent programme has demonstrated.

Number one, that one size doesn't fit all. Early career creatives from a range of different backgrounds will benefit from a range of different supportive approaches.

Number two, the importance of community, that creating welcoming spaces for peers to come together to talk and exchange, is really valuable and valued.

Number three, that thoughtful tailored support enables early career creatives to grow, take risks, and bring their talent and best creative selves to the table.

Number four, that this work takes time and therefore needs properly resourcing through investment, commitment, and partnership, and that it's the responsibility of all organisations in the sector.

Lastly, I just want to say a big thank you to all the artists who you've just heard, who were up for having a conversation with me, and sharing their thoughts and voices. If you're interested in learning more about No Jobs in the Arts, and their recent programme, you can visit their website, www.nojobsinthearts.co.uk ([click here to visit No Jobs in the Arts' website](#)).

[End of Transcript, 13 minutes]

Extra information:

Jo Wheeler is based at Primary Studios, Nottingham and has been working as a creative based in the East Midlands for 25 years. Her pathway to a career in the arts included volunteering, setting up an arts partnership and PAYE jobs with organisations. Since 2009 she has been freelancing, wearing a number of 'hats' to make a living whilst keeping her connected and creative, including: artist, educator, mentor, producer, photographer and evaluator. Her work focuses on working in collaboration to explore ideas of place and belonging (<http://www.jowheeler.co.uk/>).

No Jobs in the Arts create professional development opportunities for early-career creatives working in the Visual Arts, through projects linked to the Midlands. No Jobs in the Arts CIC is registered in England and Wales with the company number 14220745.



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