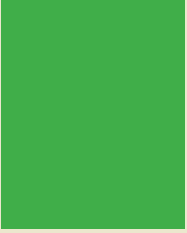



- **STRUCTURALLY
F — CKED**

ISBN: 978-1-907529-34-4

-  an inquiry into artists'  pay and conditions in the public sector in response to the Artist Leaks data

industria

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We would like to thank all of the artists who gave their time to fill out the *Artist Leaks* questionnaire as part of this project.

This inquiry has been commissioned by a-n The Artists Information Company. a-n is the largest artists' membership organisation in the UK. We support and act on behalf of our membership and the visual arts sector to improve artists' livelihoods, to inform cultural policy and to affirm the value of artists in society. a-n.co.uk

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'Structurally F—cked' is a title drawn from one of the testimonies gathered through *Artist Leaks*. This inquiry and the wider *Artist Leaks* project are one small part of an ever-expanding constellation of work around artists' pay and wider labour struggles undertaken by formal and informal groups of artists and workers. We are indebted to these precedents and the ongoing work that spans the art sector and beyond. A non-exhaustive list of additional resources can be found in **Appendix 1** at the end of this inquiry.

“The expectation to overdeliver is unspoken and loud. Everybody overcommits and as the artist you’re at the bottom of the food chain and expected to do your ‘magic’ in a system that is structurally f—cked.”

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● ABSTRACT

— This inquiry draws on data gathered through *Artist Leaks*, an online survey of visual artists conducted by Industria to probe the state of artists' pay and working conditions in the UK public sector – data which is often elusive and hidden from public view.

— Commissioned texts from Lola Olufemi, Juliet Jacques, and Jack Ky Tan contextualise and imaginatively expand on the findings of *Artist Leaks*.

● — The data and our analysis is preceded by a brief exploration of the structure of public arts funding, the socio-political context that foregrounds our present working conditions, and an examination of the current state of artists' pay.

— From the data, the inquiry breaks down artists' fees in relation to the minimum wage, where the difference demonstrates the volume of artistic labour which goes unrecognised and unremunerated.

— The inquiry also situates artists' pay within wider working conditions, highlighting systemic problems expressed within the testimonies gathered through *Artist Leaks*.

● — The inquiry suggests how greater transparency, solidarity, and joining a unionised fight for a £15 hourly minimum wage could begin to transform the sector, all the while recognising the need to push for a transformation of society via the introduction of Universal Basic Income or Universal Basic Services for all.



LOLA OLUFEMI

She wants to make something

The idea follows her. It is bigger than it was five or six years ago, the features more defined.

Like most people, she doesn't 'like' her real job. The story is the same: she sells her labour in exchange for a wage so that she can afford to rent a medium sized room in zone 4 and see what is left over at the end of the month. She will rent forever. She buys the cheap version of everything to save some extra cash; she doesn't smoke, always packs a lunch. She doesn't even want to be an artist, whatever that means, she just wants this idea to leave. She has never found the time or the resources to make anything of it. She trawls the internet aimlessly looking for funds, grants, mentorship – everything has dried up. There are attractive opportunities to work for galleries for free, to buy coffees for artists more famous than she, or to be an informal muse who stays quiet about sexual harassment. There are opportunities to work long hours for less than minimum wage, to 'feed into organisational projects creatively' but never have the chance to develop her own ideas. There are opportunities to display her work on the internet or in the gallery space for free, there are poorly-paid diversity schemes offered at art institutions owned by the historical purveyors of genocide. There are opportunities to go to fancy parties and openings and performances where she will not be able to afford a glass of wine.

Having storyboarded on the bus, doing the dishes, watching TV, at dinner with friends, at the public library, whilst feeding the baby...

Commissioned by Industria, May 2022

SHE KNOWS:

- *that she wants it to feel slow but solid*
- *the tricks to create the visuals on a tiny budget*
- *who her dream sound engineer would be*
- *what she would do in the editing suite*
- *the community centre where it could be screened*

SHE KNOWS:

- *it will most likely be mediocre, a first attempt that circulates underground and then will be lost and 'rediscovered' 20 years later. A feminist film scholar might lament that she didn't go on to make anything else; something about unfulfilled potential.*

She's heard some artists talk about creation as if it is sustenance – if they don't do it, if the idea does not reach its logical end, they simply won't survive. Really, she knows that she can't survive without the money from her jobs that keeps the lights on and her baby fed. She cannot afford to think of art in this way, her bank account won't allow it – and so she lets the idea run circles in her head until it is tired and fades away – she closes all the tabs, none of them are offering an amount she'd be able to survive on anyway.

She has a million ideas and nowhere to put them. They're not even grand enough to be called dreams deferred.

*

‘How does the artist come to be?’ is really a question about material conditions. Namely, what social, political and economic environment does art arise from and how does it develop in relation to unfolding historical processes?

‘How does the artist make their work?’ is really a question about resources. Who has the money to pay for mentorship, supplies, studio space? Who has the whole afternoon to ponder an idea, examine the ins and outs of it and decide its shape?

The artist does not arise separate from the circumstances that birth them. Like all people, artists exist on either side of a global divide structured by capital, this divide determines their access to education, housing, and creative experience. Put simply: Money can be the difference between making art that circulates and making nothing at all. Money can be the thing that makes someone feel worthy enough to begin making something. Our unnamed protagonist belongs to the canon of would-be-artists, a legacy of those who couldn’t think about making work because they had to survive. Neoliberal fantasy assures us that art can be made anywhere and by anyone – the internet has democratised almost everything – anyone can put their work out there and see what happens. But the difference between those able to survive on £16,000 a year or less is really a story about what props up the art world. The secret pots of money, passports, inheritances, lack of caring responsibilities, rent-free living, the bourgeois family.

Stripped back, every creative impulse must be read in relation to the governing structures that order social life. In an ever-worsening political economy in which wages stagnate whilst the cost-of-living rises, rent prices are unsustainable, fascists continue to mobilise and gig-economy workers are sacrificed to the demands of the market during the spread of a deadly virus... precarity is the word of the day. **Precarity** is *instability, living paycheck to paycheck, no ability to save, no hope of security*. **Precarity** is *hustle hustle hustle: freelance on top of your zero hours contract job, UBER, TASKRABBIT, DELIVEROO, AMAZON for a bit of extra cash and ‘as a working class writer, this book would not have been possible without help from [X] grant.’* The logic of precarity seeps into almost everything; cultural institutions repackage the decadence of elite art movements in their shows to hide the misery, they succumb to reactionary cultural politics, under the watchful eye of state cuts to funding, they die a slow and painful death – killing off the artists concerned with ‘identity’ first. To assume the art world remains untouched by the cruel logics of precarity is to assume that those who control it have our best interests at heart. This

is a fatal mistake. Like most elite configurations, the art world responds to the state and its austerity-driven economy. This means cuts: cutting corners, decisions made in back rooms, union busting, silencing the whistleblowers. This means: the conditions needed for unbridled creation shrink day by day.

Isn’t it preposterous, that *needing to pay rent* has stopped so many artists from making anything at all?

The art world maintains its rarefied quality via the permanent exclusion of the poor. To assume art-making is a “labour of love” that does not require remuneration but demands one to sacrifice all sense of stability, is tantamount to proclaiming it a bourgeois fantasy. It is not that we should sacrifice ‘art’ to the logics of exchange, more that, in a world where our survival depends on the sale of our labour-power, *why should drudgery be the only kind of work we are paid for?* They make money *precisely because* we cannot afford to make work, because the conditions do not allow it. The rarefied nature of the art world is reproduced. Why should others profit from our exclusion? Art institutions are quick to adopt the language of crisis: budget cuts, staffing, reduced wages are necessary for their continued survival. Senior figureheads accrue wealth whilst the institution’s very existence depends on the most disregarded labour: cleaners, admin staff, assistants – many of whom we cannot even understand as artists. The canon of would-be-artists are the lifeblood of any institution. The immediate task is to steal and redistribute resources from existing institutions in order to return the right to make things to the poorest among us, to refuse to let them bleed us dry.

The cultural arena is a fantasy playground; its boundaries are porous and malleable, *ever-changing*. Nowadays, the gatekeepers use words like ‘dynamic’ ‘diverse’ ‘innovative’ to describe the art that they protect. The art world sells us a dream: that art is a public service and an unquestionably human good. But this public service must always be privately held and stewarded. Only individual artists with the purest creative intention thrive under this stewardship. This kind of artist is against: collective bargaining, comradeship, political protest, art as propaganda. They are for: ambivalence, aesthetic pleasure, individual exploration, *feeling*. In the cultural arena, the elites invest in making us believe the latter is where true beauty lies. Their intention is to make it harder and harder for us to understand how exactly this world works. An obedient art worker: never shares contracts, asks about pay, or working conditions – never enquires into the galleries’ stance on Palestine or points out the connections between its funders and ongoing violence.

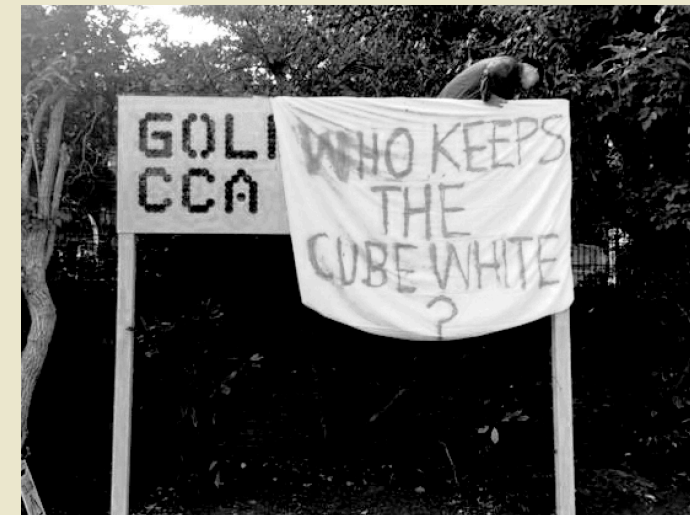
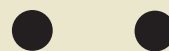
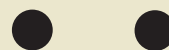
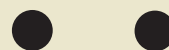
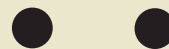
Working-class artists are faced with the same staid choice: to accept the job or the show with or inside the terrible institution, or to be poor, critical and unable to make work from outside of it.

Breaking with institutional opacity means making ourselves vulnerable. Anne Boyer writes, *I would rather write nothing at all than propagandize for the world as is*. Art work is a form of labour. But because it is labour in service of *feeling* or *expression*, the owners of the means of production enable exploitation in the name of aesthetic pleasure. The exploitation is in service of something beautiful and so it is permitted.

We do not need an unshakeable belief in the power of art to make it useful again.

This report has noted the ways that funding models are dependent on elective precarity or the assumption that art wages needn't be living wages. We owe it to each other to make the decision to demand more, to demystify institutional processes with regard to pay, hiring, curatorial decisions, to take what we can and run. To bring the cleaners, who we have more in common with, in-house. This is not as simple as total non-engagement with all art institutions or a firm belief that reform is possible (*it isn't!*). Understanding art as a form of labour requires us to be strategic, to understand our position as workers who produce profit and to demand transparency, to refuse to feed the ideological myth that the artist works in isolation and then in competition with their contemporaries. History has shown us that forms of collective bargaining have enabled us to cleave back relative autonomy. When they name a singular winner, we split the prize money, we form collectives that dissent, we make manuals and guides about how to survive the art world/school as poor, disabled, trans, black and brown people. We refuse to remain silent about the institution's ongoing connections to colonial plunder. We scupper institutional planning. Use the logic of collectivity against precarity.

We do all of this whilst remembering that fair wages are not the horizon. The only way that we can make art mean anything is to create the conditions where its production could truly be scattered, various, generative, spontaneous. Freely made, resourced and explored by all – imbued with revolutionary love – art that expresses that which language fails, or what a visual cannot communicate, or what sound leaves out. Art made for each other; for mutual benefit with no promise of reward, remuneration, genius, fame or institutional recognition.



A banner reading "WHO KEEPS THE CUBE WHITE?" being fastened to a sign for Goldsmiths Centre for Contemporary Art as part of a protest against the practice of outsourcing cleaners at the university, which took place during the press preview for the opening of the gallery on 6 September 2018
Photo: courtesy Justice for Workers Goldsmiths

*

She comes across an artist-led collaboration that details tips and tricks on 'how to steal money from institutions'. The pdf is free to download. It was written by an anonymous group who want to expose the ideological underpinnings of funding decisions. They have created a toolkit, a manual, and provided extensive information about how to get non-funded projects off the ground; where to go for help and advice and how to get in touch with other artists who are also comrades who can help. There is an entire section on how underground art movements sustained themselves through DIY shows, events and skill-sharing. They provide links to libraries with old catalogues, zines and posters advertising the work. They leave their phone numbers and emails for anyone wanting to get in touch. They offer a makeshift creche for parents who can't find the time to work because childcare is too expensive. They situate themselves in a radical tradition where art is meant to be touched, seen by as many as possible, owned by the public and not the state. The pdf proclaims that all spaces should be gallery spaces. It has never occurred to her that working together, with others, might help combat feelings of alienation. She is not yet convinced, but as she reads through the booklet... the idea comes back into view.

STRUCTURALLY F—CKED

In *She wants to make something* Lola Olufemi eloquently articulates the critical situation for artists and ‘would-be-artists’ in the current systemically flawed ‘art world’¹ – namely how to make a living and survive, whilst still having the time and resources to make your art. The vast majority of artists who are starting out (and even many who have been working for decades) are in this position; battling to make their art and get it seen in a sector which frequently expects something for nothing. It offers a glimpse into the part of the cultural sector we call the contemporary ‘art world’: a tangle of interconnected spheres, with no defining system of control or rules of engagement, fed by artists afforded little protection from exploitation and without recourse to any governing bodies or roadmap or a standard career trajectory. In many ways, with everyone out for themselves, it echoes the worst excesses of the neoliberal Thatcherite dream: each artist an individual entrepreneur in competition with all their peers. As such, young artists, those yet to establish a name for themselves or a price for their work, are left to the mercy of the market. Sink or swim. The reality of course is that the vast majority sink; only a tiny fraction with the material resources or exceptional good fortune and tenacity needed to keep afloat will survive to remain practising artists without taking on substantial additional employment.

Though there may never have been a golden era in which political conditions allowed artists to both survive and thrive en masse, it’s worth remembering that in previous generations there have been greater opportunities for those of working-class origins, without material privileges, to become – and remain – artists.

¹In recognition of the complexity of properly defining the contemporary art world due to its decentralised and nebulous structure, and our discomfort in attempting to do so, we refer to it as the ‘art world’ throughout this inquiry.

WE, INDUSTRIA

In this introduction we map out the shifting landscape of disappearing support structures for artists over the course of the last half century by way of our family histories, demonstrating how these changing material conditions and political circumstances have resulted in the current dire situation for artists. We are *Industria*, the shared identity of two artists and art workers, plus an umbrella title under which we foster collaborations with wider working groups. To situate ourselves and make transparent our potential for complicity in a status quo that offers us a degree of comfort and protection, we are two white, cis, non-disabled women artists in our early 30s.

The two of us met at art school in London in 2012, the first cohort of students paying £9000 per year for an undergraduate degree. Both white British, we were born in London in 1992 and 1993, both to parents who went to art school in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In that small generational gap, the role and accessibility of higher education has changed radically. The narrow moment in which higher education was effectively free (and even included grants to cover living expenses for some) – from the introduction of the Education Act in 1962 under Harold Macmillan’s Conservative government to its repeal under Tony Blair in 1998 – meant that three out of the four of them were the first in their families to go to university. When they emerged, it was still just about possible for artists to ‘sign on’, and even Thatcher’s Enterprise Allowance Scheme could be used to support an emerging art practice. Rents and studio rents had not accelerated beyond affordability, and squatting was still a viable option for young artists, particularly in parts of South and East London, which fostered vibrant art scenes in the 1980s and 90s.

In 1979, after a rapid expansion of social housing during the 1970s, 42% of people in Great Britain lived in council homes, a figure which has dwindled

² Harris, J. (2016) 'The end of council housing', *The Guardian*, 4 January. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/jan/04/end-of-council-housing-bill-secure-tenancies-pay-to-stay> (Accessed: 14 September 2022)

to a stigmatised minority of just 8% as of 2016.² The right-to-buy scheme introduced by Thatcher in 1980 decimated the social housing stock, and propelled the acceleration of the property market to the increasingly unaffordable rents and purchase prices we see today.

In 1988, the parents of one member of Industria moved into a home in North London which was one of the few survivors of the rapidly eroding stock of social housing. She was born there, grew up there, and her parents still live there over 30 years later. Her father could not have continued to be an artist without the secured 'fair rent' policy that signing their contract in 1988 provided.

The other half of Industria had a middle-class upbringing, enabled by her parents' education and their eventual decision to work in state sector art education rather than as practising artists. Her parents bought a small two-bedroom house in South East London in 1990, before the property boom made house prices unaffordable. In 2001, they moved to Kent together for more space and a new, higher paid, teaching job for her father.

Our access to art education, despite intimidatingly inflated fees from 2012 onwards, was dependent on the cultural capital and sense of possibility inherited from the onward chain of 'social mobility' created by that brief window in which our parents went to university. Although one of us grew up materially working class, qualifying for free school meals and the full Educational Maintenance Allowance, being a child of an artist parent offered a middle-class gloss which has eased her entry to, and movement through, the 'art world'. However, it is the housing stability which she is now afforded through her partner which has meant she has been able to keep practising as an artist.

The landscape into which we graduated is dramatically different to that of our parents' generation, with the schemes and loopholes on which they were able to rely now closed, and the costs of living, housing, and studios soaring. Having emerged from art school nearly seven years ago, we now both work in precarious nearly-full-time roles (in hospitality and various art-related freelance positions, respectively) to

support our artistic practices, with full awareness that our accumulated cultural capital and middle-classness give us less insecurity and better pay than many.

These overlapping and divergent histories have set the terms of our lives and 'careers' so far. Thinking about them together has helped shape our shared political consciousness and informed our work as Industria, including our approach to this inquiry.

INTRODUCTION TO THE INQUIRY

In 2020, Industria submitted a Freedom of Information Request to the Tate asking for information on their pay structures for artists. They responded that it was not in their 'commercial interest' to divulge this information. Troubled by this lack of transparency from an institution in receipt of significant state funding,³ we devised *Artist Leaks* as an attempt to uncover this information directly from artists themselves. We launched an open call on all our channels for artists to come forward and anonymously share with us their experiences of pay and conditions in publicly funded institutions and visual arts programmes in the UK.⁴ This inquiry is based on that data collected between 2020 and early 2022.

Cumulatively, a failure to acknowledge artists as workers and pay them for their labour perpetuates a precarious and fundamentally exclusionary sector. Through the act of making individual, and usually private, experiences public, *Artist Leaks* developed into an artist-to-artist solidarity project, aiming to counter the very culture of silence and individualism which atomises artists and primes them for exploitation.

As we write, a burgeoning cost of living crisis (on top of 12 years of politically motivated austerity policies and the Covid-19 crisis) threatens to absorb what little remains

³ Tate is an executive non-departmental public body and around 30% of its funding comes from the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS). *Government / Tate*. Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/about-us/governance> (Accessed: 14 September 2022)

⁴ We extended this to include the Republic of Ireland on request but for the sake of clarity, have not included these two submissions in the data for this inquiry.

of the narrow, self-funded financial margins from which the majority of artists operate. In this context, chronically underfunded public art institutions, faced with ever-diminishing budgets appear to be passing on the heaviest burden of these cuts to artists and their lowest-paid workers. Since the majority of artists work in other roles to support their art practice,⁵ and these roles are themselves also frequently low-paid (retail, hospitality, front of house etc.), artists often take a double hit as the jobs they rely on get cut or have their own pay and conditions degraded.

⁵ Arts Council (2018) 'Livelihoods of Visual Artists Report', p.81. Available at: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication/livelihoods-visual-artists-report>

This inquiry serves to give structural context to, and interpretation of, 104 testimonies gathered through *Artist Leaks*, from the perspective of Industria's experiences and operations at the grassroots of the 'art world'. This process has been supported by a-n The Artists' Information Company, as part of their Paying Artists campaign.⁶ Alongside funding this inquiry, a-n have provided partnership and support, inviting us to participate in a series of focus groups with artists and stakeholders to examine public sector pay for artists across exhibitions, commissions, and social practice. These have been invaluable in shaping our interpretation of the *Artist Leaks* data.

⁶ More information on the a-n Paying Artists Campaign is available here: <http://www.payingartists.org.uk/>

In addition, we have commissioned three contributions from contemporary artists and writers to imaginatively expand on the data gathered through *Artist Leaks*. Lola Olufemi's text *She wants to make something* combines powerful advocacy for a transformed world of 'unbridled creativity' with a fictionalised account that alludes to the experiences of so many hopeful 'would-be-artists' who find themselves without the means to fulfil their artistic ambitions. It pulls forcefully at the entanglement between the popular fantasy of art-making as a *labour of love* and the harsh realities of low pay and scarce resources created and perpetuated by that fantasy.

Mapping the lifespan of her arts and culture podcast *Suite (212)* against the shifting political landscape of the time, writer and filmmaker Juliet Jacques draws on the importance of the arts to social justice movements, and what is lost

through the ideological underfunding of culture. Her text traces the hopeful moment in 2017 when a democratic socialist government in the UK seemed a tangible possibility, to the aftermath of the 2019 election, and the difficult decision to end her podcast in 2021. Her crucial and contemplative text speaks to the life and death of the many cultural projects that go unfunded, and the difficulty of working creatively in the face of political hostility with little hope on the horizon for progressive change.

Jack Ky Tan has worked with a selection of specific words and phrases which appeared in the *Artist Leaks* testimonies, teasing out their meaning, ethical implications and the institutional double-speak behind them. Together they form the building blocks for an all-too-familiar lexicon drawn upon by institutions to disguise and excuse poor treatment of artist freelancers, including faceless excuses and veiled threats to those refusing to toe the line. Identifying and naming these endemic phrases draws attention to the power imbalance faced by the lone artist when dealing with the impersonal institution, proffering the possibility that through sharing and solidarity, artists might redress the imbalance of power they face.

“The only people not paid were the artists, the content providers, the whole reason for the exhibition. This isn’t a unique experience, it is often the case — you as the exhibiting artist [are] the only one **not** getting paid in the room.”

● SECTION 1 – CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

This section explains the context and parameters of this inquiry, focussing on the current conditions for artists in the UK. The state of artists’ pay and livelihoods will be examined in light of how the public sector is funded, and how these funds are distributed. This will precede a brief overview of the context of the ‘art world’ within the wider political landscape of the foundation of the welfare state, to rising inequality, low pay and precarious work, and why this status quo leads to, and entrenches inequality of access to the arts – both for artists and audiences.

For practical reasons, the remit of *Artist Leaks* is and always has been limited to visual artists’ pay and conditions – and has not included other creative freelancers, because the visual arts is our area of experience. Artists are a particularly disparate group of cultural workers – much more poorly represented and less unionised than other creative freelancers, such as musicians, actors or writers.⁷ In line with this, the extent of opacity in visual artists’ pay structures – including the ‘lump sum’ – is striking, and has led to the need for this inquiry.

Our invitation to artists to submit their experiences of pay and conditions was also limited to publicly funded galleries, institutions and projects, and excluded private sector arts organisations. Whilst we acknowledge that low and no pay are endemic across the wider ‘art world’, our focus has been on those obliged to abide by public sector codes of conduct. As Arts Council England state in their equality and fair pay advice, they are both funded by, and accountable to, the public.⁸

⁷ This is written with our full acknowledgement that exploitation, low wages, and poor treatment pervade the cultural sector as a whole. However, union membership numbers indicate significantly better protection is available for other groups of cultural workers. At the time of writing, Artists’ Union England’s current membership stands at just over 1000 members, while the Scottish Artists Union represents around 1800 members. These figures are significantly lower than the actors’ union Equity (founded in 1930), which represents 46,000 members and the Musicians’ Union (founded in 1893), with over 30,000 members. Notably both these unions are much more established than AUE or the Scottish Artists Union, which were founded in 2014 and 2001 respectively.

⁸ Arts Council England (2022) *Equality and Fair Pay*, p.3. Available at: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Equality%20and%20Fair%20Pay%20information%20sheet%20-%202023-26%20Investment%20Programme.pdf> (Accessed: 14 September 2022).

Private galleries and foundations, run as businesses, non-profit organisations or charities, are not subject to such codes of accountability, transparency or public good (other than those delineated by law). That said, there is plenty of cross-over between the public and private ‘art worlds’, which we will come to later in this section.

HOW IS ART IN THE UK (PUBLICLY) FUNDED?

The visual arts public sector in England is a complex landscape made up of organisations funded, or part-funded directly and indirectly by the government’s Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) as well as councils and local government. DCMS directly funds a number of Executive non-departmental public bodies among which are some of the large ‘bricks and mortar’ institutions familiar to the art-going public, including Tate, the National Gallery, the British Museum, and the Victoria and Albert Museum, plus a number of organisational bodies such as Arts Council England (ACE).⁹ ACE in turn distributes funding to a core list of around 800 National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs), which include internationally renowned names (eg. the National Theatre and the Southbank Centre); smaller regional organisations (eg. the Whitechapel Gallery, Yorkshire Sculpture Park, and FACT); artist-support and commissioning organisations (eg. The Artangel Trust, New Contemporaries, Art Monthly, and a-n The Artists Information Company); right down to small grassroots groups consisting of only a couple of people. Anyone can apply to become an NPO, with funding allocated upon successful completion of a (gruelling) application procedure every 3 years on a rolling basis. Outside of the NPO system, individual artists and community organisations can apply directly to ACE for various pots of short-term project-based funding via their website portal. This can be anything from a few hundred pounds to £100,000, and again, is a highly competitive process.

In the rest of the UK, decisions about arts funding are devolved to the administrations of Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, each of which has its own arts council: the Arts Council of Wales, Creative Scotland, and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. The bulk of the *Artist Leaks* data comes from artists involved in projects based in England (with roughly half of these based in London), plus a number of submissions from Scotland and one from Northern Ireland.

Whilst government funding is crucial to the running of many institutions, the vast majority will also need to procure additional income from

other sources, for example through ticket sales, charitable donation/bequeathment, merchandising, café/bar takings, and often private sector support in some form. In the visual arts, this might be through sponsorship, patronage or from commercial galleries. In her text *Class* published as part of Tate’s *Look Again* series, Nathalie Olah describes “a struggle [...] for the soul of the art world between collectors creating new ways to privatise and trade [...] and those seeking to democratise, open up and make work accessible to all.”¹⁰ At its core, the private art market values the art object as a sellable, collectable commodity to be owned, while the public art sector (ideally) has the liberty to value the act of art *making* itself, and the integrity to remain critically engaged in its relationship to society. The public ‘art world’ is therefore a key battleground in the fight for who benefits from the art system and how.

¹⁰ Olah, N. (2021) *Class*, London: Tate Publishing, p.18.

The increasing interconnectivity of the public and private sectors of the ‘art world’ is described by Morgan Quaintance in *The New Conservatism: Complicity and the UK Art World’s Performance of Progression*.¹¹ Private funding flows through public institutions and shapes their programmes,

¹¹ Quaintance, M. (2017) *The New Conservatism: Complicity and the UK Art World’s Performance of Progression* <https://conversations.e-flux.com/t/the-new-conservatism-complicity-and-the-uk-art-worlds-performance-of-progression/7200> (Accessed: 14 September 2022).

muddying the waters and obscuring the boundaries between them.¹² Gaps in public funding are frequently plugged by (sometimes ethically dubious) private sponsorship of programmes or buildings, and commercial galleries frequently step in to cover some of the costs of public exhibitions for the artists they represent – in the process raising the artists’ cultural capital, and with it

¹² Conversely, public funding also makes it into the hands of private companies. According to a Freedom of Information request submitted by Quaintance to Arts Council England, Frieze received £366,371 in ACE funding between 2004 and 2017 through their ‘not-for-profit.’

often their prices on the open market. This last point came up several times in the a-n focus groups we attended, with a sense that artists working in the public realm who did not have commercial representation were at

¹³ Demonstrating this confusion, one participant in the *Artist Leaks* data listed a project commissioned by the Freeland Foundation, a private art foundation and registered charity set up by Elisabeth Murdoch in 2015.

a disadvantage in being selected for exhibitions. Not only do these overlaps between public and private help obscure the threadbare state of public funding, they also potentially narrow the field of artists selected to show in the public sphere to those who already have gallery representation.

The obfuscations between public and private set the tone for how artists feel their labour is valued and seen in society at large. If the assumption of public funders and institutions is that artists are commercially represented, and therefore making money through the sale of their work in the private

sector, there is a sense that commissions or work that go into a public exhibition will either be recuperated through sales, or an increase in an artist's 'stock' due to a prestigious exhibition at a public institution raising their profile. This contributes to a wider assumption that it is the artwork as a *thing* which should be valued and paid for, over and above artistic labour. This expectation is absolutely not a reality for most artists.

This overlap between the public and private realm and the assumptions it generates are therefore a key mechanism in separating actual *artistic labour* from pay in the public art sector. The contention of this inquiry is that re-emphasising the connections between pay and labour is a vital step in re-structuring the 'art world' to be more fair and equitable. We have therefore sought to maintain a distinction between artistic labour and the art object in the public realm throughout the scope of the inquiry.

BREAD AND ROSES

Arts Council England has its roots in the post-war settlement, which between 1946–1948 saw the establishment of a social safety net, including the National Assistance Scheme and the National Health Service. The Arts Council of Great Britain was set up during this period, and in 1951 its Secretary General described it as growing “few, but roses”, bringing to mind the famous Labour Movement demand for ‘bread and roses’ – that to live well citizens deserve not only the essential, but also the enriching. In his introduction to Arts Council England’s 2020 *Let’s Create* strategy, Nicholas Serota invokes these words, describing “a blossoming of creativity across the country”.¹⁴ Serota states that the “the surest way

¹⁴ Arts Council England (2020), *Let’s Create*. Available at: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/lets-create/strategy-2020-2030/introduction> (Accessed: 14 September 2022).

to fill the future with every variety of flower is to recognise that we can all be gardeners”. For all this florid language, however, any mention of bread is conspicuously absent at a time where the funding required to make anything ‘grow’ has been decimated. Since 2008, public arts funding in

Great Britain has declined by 35%, with local government investment in the arts falling by 45%.¹⁵ Without the means to meet our basic needs, the idea that we can all be gardeners – all making and being involved in the arts – is purely rhetorical. This includes a public left without the time or money to enjoy the arts, as well as artists so preoccupied by making ends meet that they have insufficient time to make art.

¹⁵ Bakare, L. (2020) ““Triple Whammy” of funding cuts has left UK arts vulnerable – report”, *The Guardian*, 8 June. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2020/jun/08/triple-whammy-of-funding-cuts-has-left-uk-arts-vulnerable-report> (Accessed: 14 September 2022).

Examining public arts funding in light of the creation (and erosion) of the welfare state cements the link between a struggle

for better arts funding today, and the wider struggle against a continued degradation of public services and social safety nets through austerity policies. The demand for the state to support a thriving artistic culture is therefore part of a wider push for a better quality of life for everyone. This is why the public art sector matters to us and we want to see it radically restructured in the interests of those it serves – including the artists at its heart: bread *and* roses.

THE CURRENT STATE OF ARTISTS’ PAY IN THE SECTOR – AND WHO IT EXCLUDES

Artists operate in a disjointed and ill-defined ‘art world’, often working on multiple projects simultaneously and juggling a portfolio of low paid,

¹⁶ The ‘precariat’ is one three subsections of the contemporary working-class, as defined by the Great British Class Survey in 2011: Savage et al. (2013) ‘A new model of social class? Findings from the BBC’s Great British Class Survey experiment’. Available at: http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/49654/1/Savage_New_model_social_class_2014.pdf (Accessed: 14 September 2022).

precarious roles in order to make up the shortfall in income from their art practice. As such, they can collectively be described as a ‘precariat’¹⁶, or part of what Kuba Szreder has termed the ‘projectariat’¹⁷ – an apt descriptor for the demographic of cultural workers engaged on a project-to-project basis. Szreder states that this status quo is integral to the

way the art system runs: “just as the capitalist economy relies on the exploitation of labour, the global circulation of contemporary art is underwritten by the precarious labour of artistic dark matter.”¹⁸

¹⁷ Szreder, K. (2021) *The ABC of the Projectariat*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp.194-196.

¹⁸ Szreder, K. (2021) *The ABC of the Projectariat*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, p.3.

Artists are rarely *employed* (in the widely understood sense of the term, e.g. on PAYE contracts, with a pension, sick pay, parental leave, holiday pay etc.) to work as *artists*, instead, like many creative workers (e.g. musicians or actors), they tend to be self-employed. This means they don’t have the legal protection of the minimum wage, and although the self-employed set their own rates of pay, the reality is that artists’ fees are generally already fixed – perhaps with a tiny bit of room for upwards negotiation for those with the confidence to push for it.

Artists often have erratic incomes, and having parallel jobs makes it very difficult to get an accurate picture of how much they earn, and especially

¹⁹ Arts Council (2018) ‘Livelihoods of Visual Artists Report’, p.81. Available at: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication/livelihoods-visual-artists-report>

how much they earn *from their art*. The most recent data comes from the Arts Council England’s *Livelihoods of Visual Artists Report*¹⁹ (published 2018), which whilst imperfect in its scope, bears out the perilous state of artists’ pay.

The report found that in 2015, the mean combined total income for artists was £16,150, of which only £6,020 was from their art practice. This positions artists in the lowest income bracket and within the category of workers that earn, on average, less than the national living wage (as defined by the Living Wage Foundation).^{20 21}

²⁰ 2015 Statistics taken from the Arts Council (2018) 'Livelihoods of Visual Artists Report'. Available at: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication/livelihoods-visual-artists-report> (Accessed: 14 September 2022).

The Livelihoods of Visual Artists Report concluded that the result of increasing financial pressure 'is likely to represent a threat to artists and the continuation of artistic practice.'²² With inflation at the time of writing hitting 11%, along with the Covid-19 crisis having hit incomes (due to cancelled work, job-losses or long-term illness), this threat is greater than ever. Statistics indicate that many artists have already been forced to stop practising throughout this period,²³ while texts such as Harry Josephine Giles's *I Woke up and the Arts was Gone*²⁴ highlight the acuteness of the situation and its unequal effects.

²¹ Living Wage Foundation (2022) *What is the Living Wage?*. Available at: <https://www.livingwage.org.uk/what-real-living-wage> (Accessed: 1 December 2022).

²² Arts Council (2018) 'Livelihoods of Visual Artists Report', p.10. Available at: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication/livelihoods-visual-artists-report> (Accessed: 14 September 2022).

²³ Bradbury et al. (2021) 'The Role of the Arts during the Covid-19 Pandemic', p.23. Available at: https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/UCL_Role_of_the_Arts_during_COVID_13012022_0.pdf (Accessed: 14 September 2022).

Bodies such as Artists' Union England (AUE) and a-n make and regularly update recommendations for artists' rates of pay which take into account freelance overheads including saving for a pension, sick pay and holiday. But as this inquiry shows, remuneration frequently falls well

below these guidelines and many artists describe hardly ever making minimum wage.

²⁴ Giles, H.J., (2020) 'I woke up and the arts was gone'. Available at: <https://harryjosephine.com/2020/03/20/i-woke-up-and-the-arts-was-gone/> (Accessed: 14 September 2022).

These material conditions are inevitably exclusionary, resulting in an over-representation of those who can rely on generational wealth or a partner's stability in the face of widespread precarity, either to live off directly or to provide cushioning against the heavy emotional and financial burden of uncertainty and risk.

Racialisation, class stratification, ableism, marginalisation based on gender or sexuality, as well as caring and parenting responsibilities, all represent intersectional barriers that limit artists' capacity to cope with the additional 'elective' precarity of being an artist. As long as conditions of pay in the 'art world' fail to sustain artists, then exclusion and inequality are systemic – they are baked in – and no amount of 'diversity and inclusion' programming or thematic engagements with identity can upend this exclusionary status quo.

Funding, which must include paying artists and cultural producers enough to cover their living costs, is vital to the emergence, and continuation of art and culture. In our second commissioned work, Juliet Jacques recalls the gradual decline of her creative project *Suite (212)* as the support she needed to sustain the endeavour and pay participants remained elusive.

“When I requested a fee I was told this would have to come out of the production budget, which we had already confirmed was not enough to cover the costs of producing the show.”

Commissioned by Industria, May 2022

JULIET JACQUES

On Suite (212)



Can I Have a Grant
© Mr. Fish, courtesy the artist

In July 2017, I hosted the pilot episode of a radio programme on London community station Resonance 104.4fm. I had long wanted to present something on Resonance, and years earlier, had conceived a show called *Writers on Writing*, giving fellow authors an hour-long slot to discuss their works and the ideas behind them. In the wake of the General Election, in which Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn had secured 40% of the vote on a social democratic platform and made working-class access to the arts a key manifesto pledge, I wanted to broaden my pitch. By then, I was based at Somerset House Studios, as part of a subsidised scheme that allowed creative artists an affordable working space in central London. There, I constantly spoke to visual artists, filmmakers, musicians and others about their routes into their work, and how they made it sustainable. So, I decided to incorporate these conversations into an interdisciplinary programme that combined interviews with artists about their practice with retrospectives on individuals or movements, and panel discussions with practitioners, academics and critics about political issues that affected the arts.

Titling the show was difficult. I considered ‘Cultural Marxism’, *détourning* the old far-right euphemism for Jewish – and especially Frankfurt School – presence in university faculties, but the Nazi origins of the phrase made it irredeemable, and I didn’t want to tie my show solely to Marxist ideology. (In any case, Resonance was Ofcom-regulated, meaning such a name would likely invite vexatious complaints about our objectivity). Eventually, I chose *Suite (212)* after a 1975 film by post-war Korean-American artist Nam June Paik, a ‘personal New York sketch book’ that examined the corporate-led gentrification of the bankrupt city, and New York’s role as a centre of US art and media, generously bringing segments by artists such as Douglas Davis, Shigeto Kubota and Jud Yalkut into its collage. It wasn’t perfect, but it captured something of the spirit I wanted to work within, didn’t have many obvious connotations, and I liked the idea of ‘*Suite (212)*’ as a hotel-like enclave where we could have meaningful conversations.

In launching *Suite (212)*, I was trying to fill two significant cultural gaps. One had been left by the disappearance of TV programmes such as *The South Bank Show*, in which artists spoke about their careers in detail, BBC2 and Channel 4’s shift away from broadcasting arthouse or *avant-garde* films or showcases for new artists (in any field), and the decline of the concept of cultural democracy that underpinned the BBC’s output in the post-war decades. The other was within the burgeoning left-wing ‘alternative’ media scene of self-funded YouTube shows and podcasts. In the 2000s, there had been a vibrant circle of politically charged blogs dealing with culture, looking at literature, philosophy, music, cinema, television, architecture and sport from a socialist perspective – several of those bloggers, such as Mark Fisher and Owen Hatherley, broke into the fringes of mainstream media. Corbyn’s surprise capture of the Labour leadership led the left to pivot towards a more active involvement in democratic politics, and a more pronounced interest in economics, rather than trying to disseminate egalitarian ideas through the arts. But this still seemed important to me, as part of the project of building the hegemony needed to support what looked, in summer 2017, like the inevitability of a democratic socialist government – and purely for its own sake.

Like Corbyn and the thinkers who inspired the concept of cultural democracy – John Berger, Stuart Hall, Jennie Lee, William Morris, Raymond Williams and others – I was against a utilitarian approach to the arts, seeing them as something that enriched people’s lives in ways that could never be quantified, rather than as a profit-making enterprise. I was also influenced by my friend Mark Fisher, who wrote in 2010 that: “It’s worth recollecting the peculiar logic that neoliberalism has imposed: treating people as if they’re intelligent is, we have been led to believe,

‘elitist’, but treating them as if they’re stupid is ‘democratic’. It should go without saying that this assault on cultural elitism has gone alongside the aggressive restoration of a *material* elite.” Sadly, Mark died in January 2017, and so did not see Corbyn tell a huge Glastonbury crowd that “In every child there’s a poem, in every child there’s a painting, in every child there’s music”, or a British journalist’s sneering response of “Don’t encourage them, Jeremy”. I think he, like many of my friends and me, would have felt energised by this: it would have confirmed to him that this was a mainstream political project that he could get behind, and clarified the sneering, mean-spirited nature of its opponents.

In an interview with the online-only *New Socialist* magazine (also founded in 2017), with *Reel Politik* podcast co-host Jack Frayne-Reid, I summarised *Suite (212)* as “a show that looks at the arts in their cultural, political, social and historical contexts”. In our first season, which opened with an episode on the uses and limits of cultural criticism, I discussed gentrification with academic Alberto Duman and artist Laura Grace Ford, race and racism in the arts with artist Larry Achiampong and dancer/writer Alexandrina Hemsley, and the legacy of cultural democracy and Corbyn’s Labour with Loraine Leeson, Hasan Mahamdallie and Hilary Wainwright. I also interviewed writers Sheila Heti and Chris Kraus during their visits to London, and convened panels on the cultural legacy of the October Revolution, filmmakers and the May 1968 uprisings, and post-war British experimental literature, using connections I’d made through Somerset House Studios and in my journalistic career.

Despite what I thought was a strong roster of guests covering subjects that were either absent from British broadcasting or not discussed in their proper political contexts, the show received very little coverage – just that one *New Socialist* interview before the 2019 General Election. I was never sure why: I was active in promoting the show on Twitter and other social media, and linked into both legacy media and various new left outlets, but that never translated into any more features or interviews. Nonetheless, *Suite (212)* built up a small but committed audience who seemed to appreciate the way it credited them with intelligence and a keen interest in the arts. It went weekly for its second series, beginning in September 2018 with Tom Overton (and, briefly, Lara Alonso Corona) joining me as co-hosts. I was in the final year of an AHRC-funded PhD in Creative and Critical Writing at the University of Sussex, so doing the show on a voluntary basis (as all of Resonance’s programming was made) wasn’t impossible, although the amount of research needed for the panels on contemporary subjects was a problem. As a result, my episodes tended towards historical figures or movements with which I was already familiar. These were interesting and informative but took me away from the show’s

intention – to interrogate present relations between the arts, politics and socio-economic circumstances.

Even with three hosts taking turns, a weekly programme proved unsustainable. (James Butler, the presenter and co-founder of Novara FM, which aired on Resonance and was a model for *Suite (212)*, warned me about how much work it would be.) The main reason was that we could not work out a source of enough finance to spend one day per week researching and planning each episode, and another to record/broadcast. Arts Council England already funded Resonance, which made it unlikely that they would fund individual programmes, and I didn't want our ability to criticise the Arts Council undermined by relying on it for support. (We never did an episode about it, but I often thought about the cover of Richard Witts' *Artist Unknown: An Alternative History of the Arts Council* (1998), with a stick-drawing of an artist painting a portrait of a bureaucrat above the caption 'Fucking Assho' and asking 'Can I have a grant so I can finish my art?' as the bureaucrat walks in.) There was no obvious source of funding from any other cultural organisations – and taking money from any would have presented the same problem regarding our objectivity – nor from Labour or any other political party or trade union. The only similar show on mainstream radio, the BBC's *In Our Time*, had a high-profile host in Melvyn Bragg, and a team of well-paid researchers working on it.

We terminated our weekly series early, in May 2019, as neither Tom nor I could fit the amount of work required into our freelance schedules. I posted a long Twitter thread from my personal account about the amount of reading, watching films and other research needed for each show, as well as the time it took to secure guests and find a recording time, maintain the Soundcloud and iTunes archives, write and circulate the agendas, produce episode descriptions (with links to almost every work referenced on each one), and post them all on social media. I also said that we might have built up a sustainable audience if I'd spent more time on the *Suite_212* account, tweeting about UK cultural policy and global issues affecting the arts, but that would have constituted a full-time job in itself.

At *The World Transformed* festival in September 2019, people told me they missed the show, but I was soon focused on the election effort, writing about Labour's arts policies and using my contacts to get more than 500 artists, writers, filmmakers and other cultural workers to sign an open letter backing the party. For me, this filled the gap left by the programme – which I could not have used to support the campaign due to Ofcom's objectivity rules, which applied to Resonance 104.4fm. I was

distraught about Labour's crushing defeat and the subsequent restoration of the party's right-wing to its leadership: I decided to bring back *Suite (212)*, partly to reorient myself towards the arts after the collapse of our political project, and partly to help my cultural comrades to process the result and its consequences.

I put together a Patreon for people to support the show, which would return to Resonance on a monthly basis, with just me hosting it, with exclusive recordings of live events where I spoke to creative artists, and my old articles on the arts, for subscribers. The Covid-19 pandemic put paid to those events and delayed our return to the radio. To maintain a sense of community during the first lockdown, I instead began the *Suite (212)* Sessions – a series of home-recorded, hour-long interviews with artists in which we talked about how the pandemic had affected their practice, and their relationship with politics (as many of my London-based interviewees had also taken part in the Labour campaign), and focused in depth on a couple of specific works. This revived our listenership, who appreciated the chance to hear from artists in other countries (such as Deimantas Narkevičius in Lithuania or McKenzie Wark in the US), but the effect of the pandemic on many art workers' incomes meant Patreon subscriptions remained low.

Suite (212)'s apogee came when I interviewed Jeremy Corbyn, soon after we spoke together on the picket line at the Tate United protest in August 2020. I asked him about how Labour's arts policies were developed, how his interest in Victor Jara and other radical artists informed his approach to political campaigning, how the media responded to his interest in literature, and how we might react to the election defeat and the redundancies made during the pandemic. By then, it was clear that the show would never become financially viable, despite a small grant from the Lipman-Miliband Trust (who fund socialist education projects). It continued for one more year but the subscriptions never reached the required level, and rather than let the show's high standards drop, I decided to stop it, this time for good — the pandemic had made many cultural workers feel even more precarious than before, and the rising cost of living crisis means that even fewer can afford relative luxuries such as podcast subscriptions. That *Suite (212)* was unviable, and never close to transferring to a network that could have paid me to make it, strikes me as a great shame, and indicative of the current broadcasting climate — a situation that will only change if people in the creative industries concentrate their energies upon it.

“The demand on my **time** beyond producing the show was huge — I was exhausted, strung out and frustrated. The small fee and huge workload were not acknowledged.”

● SECTION 2 —

THE ARTIST

LEAKS DATA

METHODOLOGY

The Method

● *Artist Leaks* began life as a simple online Google Forms questionnaire (see **Appendix 2**), from which the anonymised data fed into a spreadsheet. The first iteration was open for online submissions between May 2020 and May 2021. At this point we re-formatted some of the questions before again circulating the form via our Instagram account, newsletter, and by word of mouth. a-n, Artist Union England and Arts Professional also publicised it, while Jamila Prowse interviewed us about it for her series *Creating Change* on the *British Journal of Photography* website in June

²⁵ Prowse, J. (2021) *Creating Change: Industria on advocating for fair pay*. Available at: <https://www.1854.photography/2021/06/industry-insights-creating-change-industria-on-advocating-for-fair-pay/> (Accessed: 14 September 2022).

2021.²⁵ We closed submissions in February 2022 with a total of 107 entries, of which 104 come under the scope of this inquiry. The full raw data can be viewed via a link on the Industria website.²⁶

● ²⁶ The full spreadsheet of responses to *Artists Leaks* is available here: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1WDMSt8uKjpnMU18m62uQEIZoErd6HLnxfKR7EPNrYmM/edit#gid=0>

The Questions

● The Google form included 18 questions (see **Appendix 2**), which artists could answer depending on: how much potentially identifying information they felt comfortable divulging; whether the question was of relevance to their particular project; and what information they had access to regarding the funding of the institution in question. They were asked either to identify the institution or funder by name, or give information about its size and location. We asked for a short description of the scale and scope of the commission, when the project took place, the artist fees, the production budget, and whether there was a separate access budget available (a question added on the helpful suggestion of one respondent). We then asked them to estimate how many full days they'd spent working on the commission, and what aspects of work and resources the funder expected the artist fee to cover.

If participants felt comfortable, they were invited to disclose their age at the time, as well as their gender, and race/ethnicity. Finally, we asked whether they felt they had been paid fairly for their time and experience; whether it was proportionate to the scale of the project; and whether they felt they were paid fairly in relation to the other workers on the project (eg. technical support workers, curators, admin staff).

The Shortcomings

The primary aim of *Artist Leaks* was to gather information we had sought to uncover through our initial Freedom of Information request in 2020, in order to counter the wider imbalance of power inherent in Tate's refusal to share its artist pay structure. Rather than simply providing a set of data from which to draw concrete conclusions, it came to operate as a space for artists to record and share their experiences. It is clearly not a scientifically designed study, and as such we treat the data with caution. For example, participants were self-selecting and may have been more likely to have had grievances to air, potentially skewing the responses towards those registering frustration at low pay and poor treatment. In addition, submissions to *Artist Leaks* were, by their very nature, unverified personal testimony – in order to provide the anonymity needed for artists to comfortably divulge their experiences without fear of 'blacklisting'. Whilst not insignificant, the sample size of 104 responses is limited, and of course may represent multiple submissions from single artists, meaning that the actual number of participants is unknown. Nonetheless, both individually and cumulatively, the responses form a valuable snapshot of the situation according to artists themselves, that matches a wider sense of inadequate pay and conditions experienced by our peers and those we met in the a-n focus groups. In addition, the generous testimonies of the artists gave crucial contextual scope to the inquiry.

FINDINGS

Inevitably, the data gathered through *Artist Leaks* was sprawling and nebulous. There were many insightful details that could be further drawn out, but for brevity we have focused on how pay, value, and labour are interlinked throughout the data and testimonies. In quantitative terms, we have concentrated on the stark gap between artist pay and the minimum wage demonstrated within the data. Meanwhile, the artists' experiences demonstrate how lack of pay often comes hand in hand with a wider disregard for their roles, compounding a sense of disrespect and exploitation. The qualitative data of the testimonies shared through *Artist Leaks* also show how intersecting social barriers exacerbate this precarity.

① Artists are propping up the public 'art world' with unpaid labour

"They seemed very comfortable with not providing an artist fee, and I didn't have the confidence at the time to question this."

In the a-n focus groups and in conversation with fellow artists, we noted a sense that the industry standard of paying artist fees as 'lump sums' obscures the actual work done by artists and creates a lack of transparency around pay; often de-linking pay and labour by placing a set 'value' on an artwork or exhibition rather than paying an artist for their time. Therefore when we first approached the data, we wanted to look at how lump sums received by the respondents were broken down.

The sense of unease expressed by the artists we spoke to about the lump sum was justified resoundingly by many examples of artist fees within the data. For example:

A £6000 fee for 2 years working full time on a major commission for an extra-large public institution in London, broke down to around £12.50 a day, or an estimated hourly rate of just £1.56.

A £3000 fee for 9 months of full-time work on a new commission for a solo show at a large public institution in London, broke down to around £16.67 a day, or an estimated hourly rate of just £2.08

A £3000 fee for 1 years' full-time work on a solo exhibition at a large public institution in Glasgow, broke down to around £12.50 a day, or an estimated hourly rate of just £1.56.

Figures that seemed at first glance to represent a relatively large sum, proffered hourly rates that were only a fraction of the minimum wage, demonstrating the sheer scale of unwaged labour these artists effectively 'donated' to prop up underfunded programming.

The long-term engagements with institutions and funders required by these large-scale projects also highlights a particular dissonance in the lack of responsibility institutions and funders appear to take for artists' livelihoods. This prompts the question of how conditions might be transformed if artists were legally recognised as workers or employees during these intensive and extended periods of engagement.

"The fee per hour worked out as pennies."

"Keep a timesheet, especially if you're being paid a lump sum that seems huge to you as an artist but is tiny in comparison with what the employed staff get and what you have to deliver."

These initial calculations pointed towards a wider disparity within the data between artists' pay and the minimum wage, let alone industry standards proposed by bodies such as a-n and Artists' Union England (see Appendix 3). To probe this apparent gap further, we broke each artist fee down into estimated daily and hourly rates for each entry, in order to contextualise them within the standards of the UK minimum and living wages (see Appendix 4).

These calculations showed that 76% of respondents were paid at hourly rates that fell below a weighted average minimum wage of £7.63 (calculated from the date ranges for the data – see Appendix 5). Rates of pay recorded in the data ranged widely, from hourly rates of £0 to £80, but with far more responses falling at the lower end of this spectrum; the median hourly rate worked out to just £2.60. This figure is well under half of the weighted minimum wage, meaning that respondents were subsidising institutions and projects with unpaid labour to an alarming

²⁷ Arts Council England (2022) *Equality and Fair Pay*, p.5. Available at: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Equality%20and%20Fair%20Pay%20information%20sheet%20-%202023-26%20Investment%20Programme.pdf> (Accessed: 14 September 2022).

²⁸ Redmond, A. (2019) *Arts Council of Wales sets minimum pay rates*, Arts Professional, 10 October. Available at: <https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/news/arts-council-wales-sets-minimum-pay-rates> (Accessed: 14 September 2022).

degree – even before taking into account artists' substantial overheads such as studio space. Shockingly, but sadly unsurprisingly, 15% of respondents were paid nothing at all.

Of the responses referring to artist fees from smaller, independent projects such as those funded by Arts Council England, 93% of artists were paid below minimum wage, suggesting that ACE's standard policy of giving 'guidance' as to minimum rates of pay for artists is fundamentally ineffective.²⁷ Interestingly, none of our respondents recorded data from projects or institutions in Wales, hinting at the possibility that the Arts Council of Wales's policy of refusing to fund applications paying below union and industry association approved rates, may be proving more effective.²⁸

A number of artist respondents also noted that the organisations they worked with asked them to apply for individual project-based ACE funding (or similar) to augment their project budgets, often with little to no support and of course no guarantee that the funding would come through to recompense them for their time. This placed an additional burden of unwaged administrative work upon artists' shoulders.

"They claim that their hands-off approach means that I have more agency. This feels contradictory to me as I believe it means that they feel they don't have to take responsibility in case anything goes wrong[...] I'm pissed off and annoyed that I had to apply for funding from ACE to supplement my budget and fee [...] I assume they will happily claim my project and hard work as part of their success when they've had little to do with it."

The data gathered by *Artist Leaks* covered a wide range of artistic labour, some of which was measured in days, and some in months or even years. Teasing out the boundaries and differences between the types of work

undertaken by artists is inevitably slippery, but we noticed a broad pattern within the data suggesting that longer-term projects (eg. exhibition-making) resulted in much lower rates of pay.

²⁹ This figure was the rate recommended by Artists' Union England as a day rate for artists with 5+ years experience as of August 2021. Their recommendations have since been updated in September 2022: <https://www.artistsunionengland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/AUE-RATES-OF-PAY-GUIDELINES-2021.pdf> (Accessed: 5 December 2022).

The outliers at the upper end of the spectrum largely came from shorter-term work like talks, workshops, and facilitation. Noting this difference, we also examined average daily and hourly rates for workshops, talks, and facilitation, taken in isolation from the rest of the data (see **Appendix 4**). While the median day rate of £90 for these types of work still fell well below the Artists' Union England industry recommended rate of £291.41,²⁹ the median hourly rate of £11.25 did at least exceed current minimum and living wage standards. However the picture remained decidedly mixed, and some respondents were still expected to carry out this type of labour for low or no pay.

The fact that average rates for workshops, talks, and facilitation were significantly higher than overall average rates of pay indicated a hierarchy by which artists' labour devoted to art-making is *valued less* than the labour they devote to these other activities. As such, when teaching and facilitation work were discounted, the median hourly rate of pay for work encompassing exhibition-making, performance, research and development, etc. dropped to just £1.88.

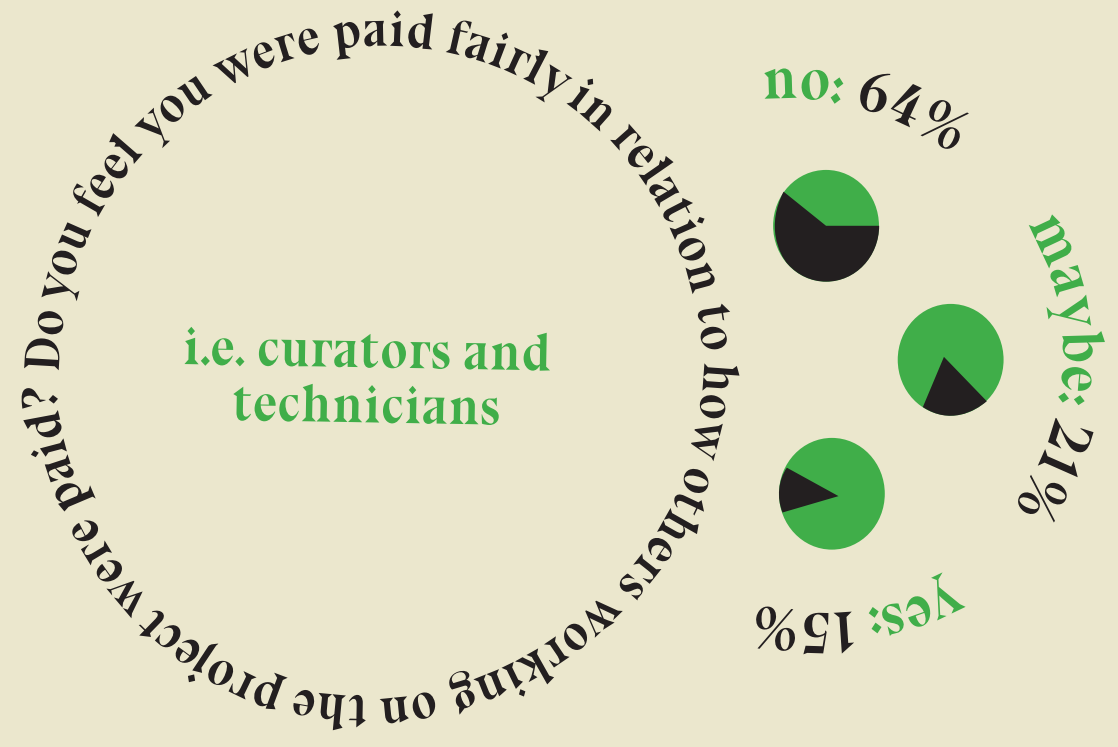
Taking stock of the experiences mapped out in the *Artists Leaks* data as well as those brought up in the a-n focus groups, we believe there are two main reasons for this disparity in how different types of artistic labour are remunerated. Firstly, these types of teaching and facilitation work tend to take up a finite number of hours, or a short span of days at most, meaning that day rates and hourly rates are much more clearly discernible. Indeed, the top four hourly rates we calculated all came from workshops and facilitation, measured in hours worked rather than days.

Secondly, the labour of facilitating workshops or giving talks happens in public and so is highly visible, making it less easy to overlook. The artist also takes on the role of educator, lecturer, or expert (rather than that of art-maker), with much of this labour happening in full view of the institution and an audience. In contrast, the labour of art-making is largely hidden away in the studio making it easy to overlook, undervalue and under pay. Again we see how a fundamental de-coupling of labour and pay within the publicly funded art sector has the effect of obscuring and diminishing the value of artistic labour related to the production and display of artwork.

② Artists are fed up of being exploited

The *Artists Leaks* online form also captured artists' own feelings about whether or not they were paid fairly. We invited participants to give answers to this in three different contexts: in relation to their time and experience; in relation to others working alongside them on the project; and in proportion to the scale of the project.





In 73% of cases, contributors did not feel they were fairly paid in relation to their time and experience. This roughly correlates to the figure of 76% of responses falling below an averaged minimum wage. On the granular level, however, the picture is more nuanced. 8% of the artists who were paid hourly rates which fell below the averaged minimum wage of £7.63 still felt that they were fairly paid.

Anecdotally, in the a-n focus groups, several artists talked about situations in which they had initially thought they had been paid fairly. Their perspectives often shifted as they became more experienced, or found out what other artists or art workers received. In our data, there was also no marked increase in pay for participants who were older, or who had been working in the ‘art world’ for longer. This confirms a widely-felt sense amongst the artists we spoke to that the problem of unfair pay persists throughout their careers, marking a state of perpetual ‘emergence’, in contrast to the (generally understood) goal of building a career that is ultimately self-sustaining.

“In over 10 years of being a jobbing artist, day fees for events and talks etc. do not seem to have changed either.”

“I dipped into my own pocket to make sure technicians and programming guests were paid while the gallery offered me only £250 to cover production.”

When the question of ‘fair pay’ was re-contextualised in relation to the pay of other workers on the same project, such as the technicians or curators, fewer artists (64%) felt their pay was unfair, suggesting an awareness among artists that low pay is also endemic for non-artist workers in the sector.

“It was the usual thing of young, early career artists feeling they were being given a chance by a renowned institution. Paid by ‘exposure’ etc. so agreeing to whatever fee was offered. It was only afterwards, talking to the technicians involved, seeing how much they were paid, that we felt we hadn’t been treated fairly.”

The above testimony from one participant highlights how greater transparency helps artists and other contractual workers to better understand how institutions’ and organisations’ pay structures operate, in order to discern their own positions within them. It also demonstrates why opaque pay structures potentially benefit commissioners seeking to balance their budgets. Whilst ultimately we need that transparency to be built into institutional policy, this account indicates how the sharing of

information between workers can function as a form of worker-to-worker solidarity, helping to illuminate institutional hierarchies when we're collectively left in the dark.

“I raised the issue of the very small fee in relation to the scale and workload and complexity of the project and was told that there was no way to increase it and there was zero interest from the senior staff to reconsider.”

74% of responses deemed the artist fee ‘unfair’ in relation to the scale of the project; the highest total amongst the three questions focusing on fairness. For artists, scale might encompass the amount of time spent working on the project, the size of exhibition space, audience numbers, the overall size and reputation of an institution, and the production budget provided.

Interestingly, there was no apparent correlation between the scale of the institution and whether artists deemed their pay ‘fair’, or whether the hourly rates met the averaged minimum wage. However, while larger scale production budgets were apparent in projects commissioned by large and extra large institutions, these generally did not equate to better hourly rates for the artists. Three responses recorded six-figure production budgets:

A large solo commission at an extra large institution in London had a production budget of £106,000. The artist fee for this full-time 7 month project was £2500, which breaks down as an hourly rate of £2.23.

A major solo commission at an extra large institution in London had a production budget of £120,000 (with additional funds raised later). The artist fee for this full-time 2 year project was £6000, which breaks down as an hourly rate of £1.56.

A large institution in London had a production budget of £150,000 for a large solo commission and associated catalogue and public programme. The artist fee for this full-time 9 month project was £3000 which breaks down as an hourly rate of £2.08.

For these prestigious projects, money was apparently readily available for fabricating the artwork and staging exhibitions, but not for adequately paying the artists for their labour. Unsurprisingly, in each of these cases, the contributors deemed their pay ‘unfair’ across all three of the parameters.

These three examples emphasise the persistent expectation that the ‘prestige’ (and possible added market value in the commercial sector) of working with large institutions constitutes remuneration in and of itself. This clearly led to a sense of exploitation and unfair conditions among our artist respondents. Several artists in the a-n focus groups suggested that their expectations around artists’ pay often change according to the size of the institution or organisation they are working with. When they felt they were contributing to a grassroots or community arts ecology, they were more comfortable accepting a lower fee. Whilst this benevolence may be well-placed at the unfunded grassroots end of the ‘art world’ as it currently exists, this creative enthusiasm can be seen to be exploited further up the food chain. At all levels of the ‘art world’, there is a persistent and weighty expectation that artists can and should ‘donate’ their labour, thus maintaining a status quo in which artistic labour is undervalued and overexploited.

“I was originally offered a £1500 fee. I said this was unacceptable. I was told that most artists in my position (ie showing on this scale, at this institution) simply did not need the fee, and so did not question it or demand more. I asked for £10,000 and was told this was impossible [...] I eventually renegotiated a £3000 fee only by arguing that other medium sized institutions were paying this amount for solo commissions. I was told that in the future the institution would re-examine their fees for artists.”

③ “It isn’t just about money — it’s dignity and self worth”

The above example demonstrates some of the difficulty and frustration that comes from the expectation that established artists working at this level are simply able to philanthropically ‘donate’ their labour to the institution. Throughout the written testimonies submitted to *Artist Leaks*, the onus was on artists to negotiate their fee, often for them to be told that the budget could not accommodate their modest requests. Many artists reported their labour being unremunerated and undervalued, and then being made to feel embarrassed for attempting to ask for more, which had a detrimental effect on their self-confidence and self-worth.

The testimonies speak for themselves:

“A lack of fee was embarrassing, [I] felt ashamed and [it was a] blow to [my] self confidence – only when talking to fellow artists years later did I find out I was not the only one [...] To have huge exposure while you are struggling to cover your day to day expenses [is] mental torture.”

“We were made to feel like them paying for my train fare and putting me up for three nights in a hotel was payment enough.”

“The curator was aloof and arrogant at best, they took six months and three emails to pay the flimsy amount”

“[It was] an embarrassing and awkward experience”

“Almost had a nervous breakdown”

“£1600... for 15 months work isn’t a wage to live off & the tournament of artists to ‘know their place’ in the arts eco-system needs to stop. It’s abuse. Most of us [experienced] mental and physical exhaustion. I had two part-time jobs to support myself & I never felt this in those demanding roles I juggled, but in this arts opportunity I’m suddenly losing hair & sleep.”

“The pressure to make things work and to be grateful and positive can really break you. They never factor in reflection, rest and the expectation to overdeliver is unspoken and loud. Everybody overcommits and as the artist you’re at the bottom of the food chain and expected to do your ‘magic’ in a system that is structurally fucked.”

“I did eventually get paid but having to fight for it was demoralising and the whole experience has made me considerably lose confidence. This was early 2019, I haven’t made any work since.”

④ No roses without bread, no ‘diversity’ without meeting artists’ material needs

“I have been working on projects for over 10 years and have had the experience of feeling demoralised and used after completing commissions. I had hoped I had moved on from this, but even now it continues to happen. I don’t think organisations understand the effect such exploitative practice has on artists’ mental health. It can grind people down so they leave the sector – [those with] years of experience or those new to the sector leave because they do not have the financial cushion or feel excluded because of race, disability, gender or age.”

Despite the aggressive culture wars currently being weaponised by the right wing media and some parts of the Tory party, it is still (nominally at least) a stated aim of our public institutions and arts councils to foster diversity within the sector and increase accessibility. The proliferation of this language within ‘liberal’ art circles has coincided with the radical budget cuts (both within and outside of the cultural sector) demanded by the austerity policies of the last 12 years, as well as the erosion of state support in the preceding decades under successive neoliberal governments.

As the 2020 LSE working paper *The art world's response to the challenge of inequality* observes, 'strategies around diversity and inclusion in the cultural sector risk being largely delinked from their intersections with material marginalisation, thus running the risk of disconnecting issues of representation from wider struggles around production and social and distributive justice.'³⁰

The qualitative data of the *Artist Leaks* testimonies gave multiple examples of the structural barriers imposed on artists by institutions that pay lip service to care, diversity, and accessibility, whilst at the same time fundamentally failing to address the key thing that could begin to dismantle these barriers at the most basic level within their organisations – fair pay. The overwhelming sense of precarity and exhaustion that is borne out by the testimonies was exacerbated and sharpened in instances where artists recognised that they were subject to intersecting inequalities. We have broadly categorised these into four groups for closer examination: gender and caring; disability; race; and intersectional precarities.

“to see individuals and institutions who are perpetuating these ways of working paying lip service to fair pay for artists whilst not providing it themselves is mind blowing.”

Gender & caring responsibilities

The *Artist Leaks* data set was not large enough to be able to spot any possible gender pay gaps at work. However, there were many traces within the testimonies which point to the ways institutions and commissioners can be complicit in upholding gendered discrimination.

Several artists brought up the added precarity of parenting and caring in an unstable sector that doesn't generally recognise and support the needs of those with such responsibilities.³¹ The respondents that highlighted this as part of their experience were all mothers.

Some noted instances in which commissioners expected schedules and paces of work not compatible with their parenting roles. This included an artist who was expected to take their young, disabled child on a two hour round bus trip across the city to collect artwork. Elsewhere, the additional burden of childcare costs for artists already paid low fees was a barrier. One respondent reported being illegally denied maternity

³⁰ Kolbe et al. (2020) *The art world's response to the challenge of inequality*, p.15. Available at: http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/103146/1/Kolbe_art_worlds_response_challenge_inequality_wp40_v2.pdf (Accessed: 14 September 2020).

³¹ This issue has been extensively documented by the project *How not to exclude Artist Parents*: <http://www.artist-parents.com> (Accessed 14 September 2022) and Hettie Judah's recent book (2022) *How not to Exclude Artist Mothers* (and other Parents), London: Lund Humphries

pay in her additional role as an art worker, demonstrating the double hit of precarious working conditions in the jobs artists rely on for their livelihoods as well as their self-funded practices.

Discrimination against carers and parents continues to fall most heavily upon women, as the testimonies below bear out. This heavily gendered dynamic relates intrinsically to the conceptualisation of art making, like caring responsibilities, as a 'labour of love'. Kuba Szreder has paraphrased Angela Dimitrikaki in diagnosing that "this cross-usage owes to the similarities between housework and artwork, as both are unrecognised as productive work by mainstream economies, both implicate emotional and imaginative investments and both are rarely paid".³²

“Over the course of 10 months I had to go on 27 two to three day trips outside of London. I am a single mum of a son who was only seven at the time.”

³² Szreder, K. (2021) *The ABC of the Projectariat*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, p.146.

“I was expected to have childcare when they needed me for an extra project. The deadlines changed from our original agreement as a staff member wanted to go on holiday. I explained it was impossible for me to get childcare and fulfil the deadline but was ignored.”

“When the commissioner failed to pay the first instalment (which arrived late, without any consideration of my work schedule or childcare arrangements) they asked me to get a credit card and pay myself for it.”

Alongside the additional precarity associated with caring and artist-parenthood, one respondent recalled the threat of being blacklisted when they raised their discomfort at being expected to work alongside artists identified by their colleagues as abusers. This demonstrates how artists' precarity can be wielded against them to buy silence, entrenching abuse and inequality in the process.

Respondents to *Artist Leaks* were invited to disclose their gender identity. Of those who chose to divulge this information, 86% identified as women, 8% as non-binary and 6% as men. This overwhelming majority of women is likely, in part, due to the make-up of our audience.³³ However, in addition, it's likely that women and non-binary respondents were over-represented, in part at least, due to their greater risk of experiencing discrimination and poor treatment given that the experiences documented in *Artist Leaks* are generally negative. Another explanation

is that women and non-binary artists felt more prepared to share their experiences, whether due to a keener awareness of exploitative practices, being better primed to support one another, or because they simply felt more able to refuse the (both externally and self-imposed) demand that artists maintain a seamless veneer of success.

³³ Instagram, our main channel of communication, breaks down our followers as 74.6% female and 25.3% male.

A lack of care and resources for disabled artists

“It felt like overworking was just a norm in London and one that I couldn’t keep up with, especially with chronic illness. Sometimes I felt my boundaries were not respected.”

Like the artist mothers who experienced a lack of consideration for their scheduling requirements, disabled artists (as well as an artist working to make their work accessible) also reported a lack of institutional flexibility in response to differing capacities and needs, both financial and otherwise.

Only 11% of respondents were informed about the possibility of a separate access budget in addition to the artist fee and production budget. 44.5% were not told whether there was one, and 44.5% said there was not. This indicates that institutions and commissioners are not generally forthcoming with information on what support can be made available (if any) to ensure equality of access for the participation of disabled artists. It implies that in most instances the responsibility is on disabled artists to request support.

This chimes with the strength of feeling apparent in the a-n focus groups we attended, that the balance needs to shift towards commissioners taking responsibility for introducing the topic of access and support, rather than the artists individually. The dynamic in which the artist needs to *request* support entirely occludes the possibility of building ‘access intimacy’ (Mia Mingus’s term for the “elusive, hard to describe feeling when someone else ‘gets’ your access needs.”³⁴) Without ring-fenced access budgets, flexible to the needs of artists who might require them, along with adequate resources to foster access intimacy, the additional layer of precarity imposed upon disabled artists means that institutional aims for ‘inclusion’ often remain purely rhetorical.

“The curator that organised it took advantage of my disabilities, fobbing off my needs and every time I questioned contracts and rates of pay I was micromanaged into feeling guilty for asking.”

³⁴ Mingus, M. (2011) *Access Intimacy: The Missing Link*. Available at: <https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2011/05/05/access-intimacy-the-missing-link/> (Accessed: 14 September 2022)

“When I told them I was struggling with the subtitles as I’d not done it before, I asked if there was an access fund as this was extra work [but] they ignored me.”

The insidious exploitation of artists of colour

“I haven’t started the project yet and I’m already dreading it and the amount of time and effort I’ve put in. I regret taking it now if I’m honest. I hate the normalisation of exploitation in the arts in the UK, especially as a Black artist.”

As with gender, the scope of *Artist Leaks* was not broad enough to extrapolate any direct patterns of discrimination from the recorded artist fees. In qualitative terms, however, the artists’ accounts gave insights into the interaction of racism with the precarity of artists’ lives, as these testimonies demonstrate:

“I realised later the invitation to be part of the show was most likely a late realisation that there were no non-white artists on the line up. When it came to sending my invoice I didn’t hear from the gallery. My payment terms had passed and I contacted them to reissue a new invoice with my late payment fees and the gallery claimed my email tone was aggressive. I was made to feel like the villain for asking for pay for work that’s already been done. They eventually paid me but failed to pay my late payment fee. I wish I had quit working as an artist then as many more moments like this would soon happen in my life and I don’t know if it’s worth it anymore.”

“After a few weeks of socially engaged delivery, having had protracted issues getting weekly invoices paid and having to cover train fares myself whilst not being paid for the time worked, I was told the partner organisation representing the community group were no longer happy for me to work with the particular group. This happened directly after my disclosing to members of the group the details of my ethnicity. I was told that this work could not be continued with an alternative group, and that I would not receive the remaining fee (well over half the full budget) to fund the research, development and production of any new work, despite having already done some of this work. I was effectively ‘sacked’ from the commission, the position being passed to another artist, chosen by the partner organisation and who the group had worked with previously.”

“As the project went on I expressed my need for supervision as I was interviewing people daily from ages 12-99 about their experiences of race in the UK [...] They said they could only provide me with an occupational

therapist. Before I was offered the position I was told I would need to have part time work and not to see it as my main job. However due to the extensive work hours I was unable to secure flexible enough work to fit around their hours.”

The first account, in which the artist is unfairly burdened with the painful sense that they were a ‘diversity hire’, speaks to an ‘art world’ which deals within the limited terms of representation, thematically engaging with inequality (often as an afterthought) without actually addressing its roots. It also raises the issue of late payment, an experience which was relayed multiple times within the testimonies. The hostility artists frequently face when chasing their fees is overlaid with, and exacerbated by, the deployment of the racist stereotype of Black aggression.

The issue of late payment is also addressed in the second testimony above, which demonstrates a particularly concerning case of an artist having work and pay taken away from them part-way through a project, apparently as a direct result of their ethnicity. The artist’s distressing suspicion that their ‘sacking’ was discriminatory collides with their wider precarity as a freelance artist, adding to the pain of the experience.

The third testimony alludes to the often implicit assumption that artists of colour can be expected to bring their lived experience into largely white organisations without recognition and support for what this entails. This dynamic fits into a wider presumption that artists can be expected to fulfil specialist socially engaged roles without expert assistance and adequate pay, in a further stretching and exploitation of artists’ labour.

Of the *Artist Leaks* respondents who chose to disclose their race/ethnicity, 23% were from the Global Ethnic Majority, markedly higher than the estimated 6.5% of artists in the UK who identify as ‘BAME’ according to Arts Council England’s *Livelihoods of Visual Artists Report*.³⁵ It seems entirely plausible that an overlapping of precarity and racism means that artists of colour were more likely to have negative experiences to report. Again, we wonder if those who more commonly experience injustice, and speak out collectively against it, were more likely to have been prepared to disclose poor treatment.

Intersecting precarities

In unpacking some of the testimonies with reference to gender, disability, and race, this section has divulged a sense of how the material disadvantages made manifest by

³⁵ Arts Council (2018) ‘Livelihoods of Visual Artists Report’, p.13. Available at: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication/livelihoods-visual-artists-report>. A further 5.5% of respondents in this study preferred not to say, meaning this figure could be slightly higher overall.

discrimination exacerbate more generalised artistic precarity to worsen its effects. Beyond the specific instances we have drawn on here, the intersection of multiple precarities acts to compound inequality in society – either directly affecting income, or by exhausting an individual’s capacity to cope with the additional burdens they face in terms of direct or indirect discrimination. This of course negatively impacts artists’ mental health and wellbeing.

This is well-demonstrated by the testimony of one respondent, quoted throughout, who documented her experience of being working class, Black, a single mother of a young child, and going through stress-related ill health. It is clear that these interlocking experiences thoroughly compound the already precarious life of an artist.

Given the inherent difficulty in defining class in contemporary British society, we did not ask artists to identify their class position as part of the inquiry. However, the effects of an ‘art world’ built along the same lines as our heavily stratified and elitist society echo throughout the testimonies and are well-documented in the comprehensive 2018 report *Panic! Social Class, Taste and Inequalities in the Creative Industries*.³⁶

The submissions to *Artist Leaks* broadly support the conclusion that, as it stands, long-term survival in the ‘art world’, let alone the ability to thrive, demands either sustained success defined by the market, or the substantial cushion of inherited wealth or other private financial support. The exhaustion, disillusionment and anger in the testimonies is palpable, and stands in stark contrast to Nicholas Serota’s metaphor of the future ‘art world’ as a blossoming and diverse garden. Patently, the soil in which these flowers are expected to grow is parched and depleted, and the bread that should accompany the roses has been reduced to crumbs. Without drastic change, how can artists, especially those experiencing multiple intersectional precarities, be expected to persist?

³⁶ Create London (2018), *Panic! Social Class, Taste and Inequalities in the Creative Industries*. Available at: <https://createlondon.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Panic-Social-Class-Taste-and-Inequalities-in-the-Creative-Industries1.pdf> (Accessed: 14 September 2022).

“I told the curators that it was not a fee but a gesture and they agreed with me.”

Commissioned by Industria, May 2022

JACK KY TAN

In Search of Meaning

Introduction

“It isn’t just about money - it’s dignity and self worth”
– *Artist Leaks* respondent

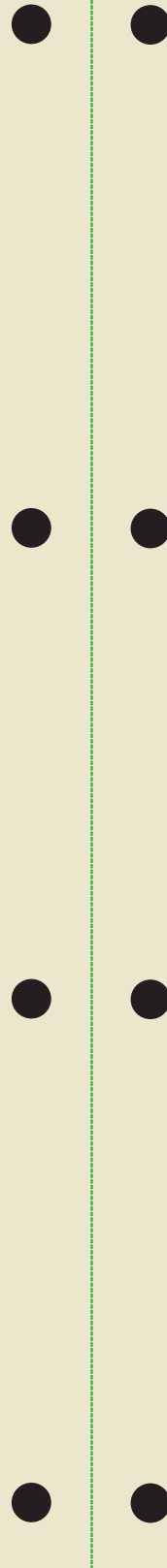
While this research has been about fair pay and fees, what emerges is the sense that it’s also about the self-worth of artists and how they ought to be treated with dignity and respect for the contributions they make to the nation’s cultural and economic life. Invariably, in the cases uncovered by Industria’s *Artist Leaks* project, unfair pay and treatment have come about via unfair means and justified with unfair reasons dressed up as good reasons.

One of the unfair means is the use of rhetoric by institutions, i.e., language used to create a persuasive or good impression but lacking in sincerity or meaningfulness. Whether knowingly or unwittingly, institutions and their representatives use and misuse words and ideas to promise, persuade and mislead artists into working for free, for very low fees or under unsafe or risky conditions. This glossary is an attempt to clarify some of the words and concepts used by institutions and to unpick the doublespeak.

Industria commissioned me to review the data they collected in the *Artist Leaks* open call. After reviewing some 104 cases, I selected words and concepts that institutions had articulated to artists, or that artists had used to describe the conditions they experienced within the working environment.

Within the practical remit of this writing commission, I wrote commentaries on the following 8 words or phrases:

- agree... but
- blacklisting
- exposure
- ghosting
- honorarium
- intend to
- silencing
- symbolic



Other words shortlisted were:

managed, nominal,
 professional, aggressive,
 difficult, embarrassed,
 set by, lucky,
 community, intern

agree... but

Usage

“we agree artists should be paid but there simply isn’t the budget”

Normal meaning

This usually indicates that a proposition holds true but with a condition or an exception. For example, we agree that the sky is blue, but at dawn and dusk it turns red. Or we agreed to drive to London from Manchester, but will take a detour via York.

The proposition is held as true and performed as such. But the exception occurs for a short time (at dawn/dusk) or as an addition (detour to York).

What the institution meant

“We disagree”

Here the institution has separated the ethical content of a proposition from its performance in order to discard the performance by an appeal to logistics. In this example, the institution could have also said, ‘*we disagree that artists should be paid*’.

Were it the case that the institution normally pays artists, but due to exceptional circumstances the artist could not be paid in this instance, then the normal meaning of ‘agree ... but’ holds sway. Where the institution regularly cites exceptional circumstances in order not to pay artists as a rule, then this phrase should be understood as meaning ‘we disagree’.

What this means ethically

In reality, this means that artists are working for free. However, the violence of this way of asking for free labour is especially pernicious because it starts by validating the work and holding forward a truth about the artist’s and artwork’s value, then immediately erasing or emptying the work of that value.

blacklisting

Usage

“...[I was asked] if I knew what ‘blacklisting’ was.”

Normal meaning

The first usage of the term ‘blacklist’ can be traced to the 17th century where lists were created of people who were suspicious, out of favour or to be punished.¹ In modern times, it occurs most prominently in employment situations, particularly in the construction industry. Workers who were involved in trade union activities were put on blacklists and information was compiled about them in secret.² These lists were then shared among employers and employment agencies. This practice of blacklisting trade unionists is prohibited under UK law.³ The aim of a blacklist is to destroy a person’s professional reputation, employability and livelihood.

² Pyper, D. (2022, May 17). *Trade unions: blacklisting*. House of Commons Library: Research Briefing Notes. <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn06819/>

³ *The Employment Relations Act 1999 (Blacklists) Regulations 2010*, 2010 No. 493 UK Statutory Instruments § 3 (2010). <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukSI/2010/493/crossheading/general-prohibition/made>

While the strict legal meaning of blacklist concerns trade union activities, blacklisting can also occur informally as a form of unspoken collective consensus among organisations. In the case of very large arts institutions with multiple national and international sites, and which are often a collection of many semi-autonomous departments or working groups within it, blacklisting can occur over time where a management consensus or policy is created of banned or censored artists. This then effectively works as a blacklist for the whole of the organisation.

What the institution meant

“we are threatening to put you on a blacklist”

Naturally, people and organisations have good and bad experiences of others who they have worked with. Institutions may organise these into memories of good or bad, painful or pleasurable, risky or safe experiences. But even if a relationship has been challenging, remembering and learning from that experience as an organisation is not the same as blacklisting a person.

To place someone on a blacklist which is then shared among staff, other curators and partner organisations, formally or informally, currently or for future reference, is a form of punishment and reputational incarceration. It is a kind of sentencing that freezes the relationship or the blacklisted person at the point of punishment, then attaches that moment to the person for their whole career, effectively erasing their professional future in the short or long term.

What this means ethically

Blacklists are problematic on two fronts: ‘black’ and ‘lists’.

lists

As discussed so far, these lists were used to punish workers. However, the act of listing itself bears examination for its colonial and Cartesian optics. Listing, measuring and mapping were a set of mathematical and logical tools used in the British Empire to survey, define and account for the land and people in the colonies. This can be thought of as a form of worlding where the list-maker or mapper remakes and reimagines colonial territories and peoples into their European Enlightenment world view, often erasing pre-existing knowledges and land use. The resulting documents – lists, maps, accounts – are often performative too when they are relied on for decision-making and thus having real world consequences.

Used in this Cartesian way, lists have the effect of severing the items listed from their contextual, narrative, embodied and relational meanings (i.e., what gave rise to them and what they are still connected to in order to have meaning). Listing ‘frees’ them as data, to be recontextualised, moved about, processed, conveyed and to be given new meaning through interpretation. A shopping list for example consists of a set of items that have been severed from their contextual meaning. This then makes it easy to reorder items, carry the list about, send it to someone else, extract further lists from or to use for other purposes than shopping. This may be fine for to-do lists, but it becomes problematic when people, communities or cultural artefacts are being put through the process of having their contextual and lived meaning erased through listing, especially blacklisting.

black

Black, in the history of European art, literature and culture, has come to mean badness. Other notable phrases using the word ‘black’ include: black sheep, black market, blackmail, black mass, black humour, black death. Aside from the rare instances of positive use, such as ‘in the black’ in accounting, ‘black’ usually denotes uncleanness, evil, death or danger. White then represents the opposite traits of goodness, purity and life. In a 2018 review of the terms ‘blacklists’ and ‘whitelists’ four researchers found that ‘whiteness’ had 134 synonyms of which only 10 had mild negative connotations. Whereas, ‘blackness’ had 120 synonyms, none of which were positive, and 60 of which were “distinctly unfavourable”.⁴

⁴ Houghton, F., & Houghton, S. (2018). ‘Blacklists’ and ‘whitelists’: a salutary warning concerning the prevalence of racist language in discussions of predatory publishing. *Journal of the Medical Library Association: JMLA*, 106(4), 527–530.

Within European Christian theology which forms the foundation of Western Enlightenment thought, good has been consistently associated with light and godliness, whereas evil with darkness or blackness, i.e. the absence of light. As such 15th century European colonisers who encountered dark-skinned peoples of the Americas and Africa labelled them as ‘Negros’, meaning ‘black’ in Spanish and Portugese. Black people were considered ‘savage’ and an ‘irrational or subrational Human Other’ who needed to be colonised, and indeed desired to be ruled by whiteness.⁵

⁵ Wynter, S. (2003). *Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument*. *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 3(3), 257–337.

These aesthetic or affective dynamics continue to operate when an institutional representative threatens to blacklist an artist. When blackness, in its Euro-Christian definition of ‘blackness as badness’, is combined with a human being, it essentialises that human being as badness or objectifies them as a wholly bad object. It allows the blacklister to ascribe savagery, irrationality or subrationality to that person as their essential or only traits. Putting blackened/baddened people on a list, then doubly reinforces the colonial violence in the process of blacklisting.

⁶ Ost, B. (2021). *LibGuides: African traditional religions textbook: Ifa: Appendix A: Glossary of Yoruba terms - the language of ifa*. <https://research.auctr.edu/>

Note: In Chinese culture, white is a funeral colour worn by mourners and considered unlucky, and therefore never worn at celebratory occasions. Black (or dúdu) in Yoruba culture represents ‘the mystery of that which cannot be seen’⁶ or earthiness and practical personality traits.⁷

⁷ Oluwole, F. C., Ahmad, M. B., & Ossen, D. R. (2013). *Colour utilization among the Yorubas of southwest Nigeria: An empirical analysis*. *Journal of Basic and Applied Scientific Research*, 3(5), 78–82.

exposure

Usage

“... [I was told I was] being given a chance by a renowned institution. Paid by ‘exposure’ etc so [I was] agreeing to whatever fee was offered.”

“I was expected to be thankful for the exposure.”

Normal meaning

‘Exposure’ is derived from its root word ‘expose’, which means to show something that was hidden or to make it visible. Alternatively it also means to reveal or tell the truth about something.

Within marketing, ‘exposure’ refers to the number or degree of people who see and are aware of a person’s or company’s brand through its marketing strategy. Within investment, ‘exposure’ refers to the amount of money an investor puts into a particular market. It also represents the risk of exposing those funds to that market.

What the institution meant

“We will be underpaying or not paying you.”

or

“We are paying you in kind through market exposure.”

Similar to **symbolic** fees, payment by exposure is another way of saying that an artist will be unpaid or underpaid. Although unlikely, it could be the case that this institution was serious about payment via market exposure and was offering a barter: artistic work in exchange for useful and impactful market exposure. If this were the case, artists should expect to receive rich and meaningful marketing data which they can use to develop their careers and future projects, for example, survey results, reach, demographics, statistics and analysis of the audiences to whom their work has been exposed. In the absence of this, it is likely that ‘exposure’ here simply means low or no payment.

What this means ethically

For the artist, agreeing to be paid by exposure undermines both their own value and those of fellow artists. Having charged a low or no fee for work, it becomes difficult to raise the chargeable fee for future work within the same institution, or for others who may have found out about how little the artist had charged for a similar commission. This also has an impact

on other artists and the wider landscape because these institutions will go on to expect to pay no or low fees to the artists they subsequently work with.

It is important also to note that artists lend as much exposure or branding to institutions as institutions do to artists. Without artists there are no exhibitions. Institutions use artists to promote and develop their brand and to gain credibility. For example, in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement, institutions have produced shows of Black artists, gaining relevance and new audiences from the reach and reputation of these artists. In this sense, institutions too are being ‘paid by exposure’ within any commissioning relationship and therefore the two exposures cancel each other out. This then leaves the artistic labour and creativity unpaid or underpaid.

ghosting

Usage

“...we were ghosted, passed around the department, lied to, and eventually we were offered half the space for half the time, a month after the agreed date”

Normal meaning

Ghosting is a term used initially to refer to romantic relationships where one partner ceases contact with the other partner in order to end the relationship.⁸ The term has gone on to be used in other situations too. Friends, colleagues and even family members can be subjected to ghosting.

⁸ Koessler, R. B., Kohut, T., Campbell, L., Vazire, S., & Chopik, W. (2019). *When your boo becomes a ghost: The association between breakup strategy and breakup role in experiences of relationship dissolution*. *Collabra: Psychology*, 5(1). <https://online.ucpress.edu/collabra/article-abstract/5/1/29/113028>

What the institution meant

“We are ignoring or silencing you”

or

“No”

Here, ‘ghosted’ was used in the context of a working relationship between an artist and a large institution and could be taken to mean ignored or forgotten. It has the effect of **silencing** someone, because you can silence someone by stopping them talking or stopping yourself listening. It is an easier way of silencing people because the ghoster does not have to make

a positive effort to disagree to a request, to renegotiate a relationship, or even to articulate their need to end communication. Instead they can simply retract their presence or contact to achieve the same effect.

What this means ethically

Human resources scholars Vagaš & Miško conclude that ghosting is a “negative phenomenon” that can “cause significant damage to human capital (that is considered to be an important element of competitive advantage of each organization)”.⁹ They assert that ghosting is a “socio-communication problem” that can lead to workplace problems and an organisation’s eventual operational breakdown. In this sense, ghosting is a bad practice that actively harms organisations and drains resources. For arts organisations in receipt of public money, this then becomes a question of unethical practice and wasting of public resources through poor management practices.

⁹ Vagaš, M., & Miško, D. (2018). *Understanding of Ghosting in Re-Education of Human Resources in an Organization*. AD ALTA: Journal of Interdisciplinary Research, 8(2). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330322019_UNDERSTANDING_OF_GHOSTING_IN_RE-EDUCATION_OF_HUMAN_RESOURCES_IN_AN_ORGANIZATION

For commissioned artists who are being ghosted, this creates a sense of bewilderment, of erasure, and of being devalued. It signals a lack of care and leaves the ghostee guessing about what the institution thinks or wants. In this instance, ghosting was used as a mechanism of disorienting the artist in order to delay and reduce the original commitment.

honorarium

Usage

“Artists were given an ‘honorarium’ of... £120. Not enough to cover even 1/2 a day’s work at Artist Union Rates”

Normal meaning

An *honorarium* is an ‘ex gratia’ payment (literal translation: ‘by favour’). This means there is no requirement or obligation to pay because the payment is made entirely out of the payor’sⁱ favour, discretion or gratitude and as a gift. Being a gift, this means that there is no legal obligation to pay or be paid (although there may be a moral or customary one). Therefore no possible legal contract leads to or results from an

honorarium. So you will not normally find a written contract in situations where honorariums are involved.

The payeeⁱⁱ would expect from the start that they are offering their service for free. Often honorariums happen in contexts where “custom or propriety forbids a price to be set”.ⁱⁱⁱ

For example, it is customary that a guest lecturer within the university sector, who is already employed as a lecturer somewhere else, would not expect to be paid for giving a guest lecture. However, the host may give an honorarium to the guest lecturer as a sign of gratitude and goodwill. A whip-round collection for someone giving a talk at a community meeting would be similar to an honorarium. There would be no expectation of payment or how much would be given in a whip-round.

What the institution meant

“actual fee”

The use of the word ‘honorarium’ here is a euphemism for ‘actual fee’. It is a fee and not an honorarium (i.e., not an ex gratia payment or gift) because there is a legal obligation to pay for the work done and there was an intention by both parties to create a contract. As discussed above, honorariums are gift payments where no expectation of a contract exists. Ironically, agreements to pay honorariums are often followed up by a written contract. In this and other instances of the *Artist Leaks* data, we see the clear intention by the parties to enter into a contractual relationship. However, in order to make the low fee appear more palatable, it is misnamed as an ‘honorarium’.

What this means ethically

The word ‘honorarium’ derives from the word ‘honour’, which means dignity, respect or esteem. To give an honorarium is to demonstrate one’s deep respect, esteem or reverence for another. However, to use the word ‘honorarium’ as a means of underpaying artists is to turn the meaning of honorarium on its head. It is a form of perversion of the term’s real sentiment because the term is used to mean the opposite of its normal meaning.

- i. The person who pays.
- ii. The person who receives payment.
- iii. Tuft University’s guidance on honorariums: <https://access.tufts.edu/what-honorarium-payment-and-how-does-one-get-paid>

intend to

Usage

“I have been told by the curators that they intend to acquire the work”

Normal meaning

‘intend to’ can be taken to express a plan or determination to take action or to act in a particular way. There is no guarantee because plans change. However, if expressed by a person or organisation that is serious and careful about what they say, it can indicate firm likelihood of action. For example, when a presidential candidate announces their intention to run for office, more often than not, this is usually followed through.

What the institution meant

“we might acquire the work”

An expression of intention does not arise in legal obligations even if it is communicated in writing, unless it forms part of what constitutes a contract.

In this particular instance curators expressed their intention to acquire the work in writing as a means of securing willingness, free work, unpaid expenses and production costs from the artist. Following a national and international tour of the work, the curators decided not to acquire the work, but asked the artist to donate it to them instead.

A fuller translation of ‘we intend to’ in this case could therefore read as ‘we might acquire the work, but it’s not likely’.

What this means ethically

Enticement and misleading artists by deliberately or negligently creating expectations leads to exploitation. This is especially dangerous where there is a large imbalance of power in the relationship, such as one between a large international institution and a young or emerging artist. It creates a culture of mistrust, where artists are unable to believe or rely on declarations or representations made by institutions. If young artists encounter this form of exploitation over a longer period of time in their early careers, this might lead to them exiting the sector entirely which is detrimental to the cultural landscape.

When words and intentions become slippery, artists may have to respond by doing a lot more work during the commissioning process of pinning down and articulating legal intention. For independent artists who are not represented by large galleries, artists who have learning disabilities or those that experience socio-economic disadvantage, the legal work, knowledge and confidence required to protect oneself within a culture of misrepresentation is a disproportionate burden. For many artists and freelancers this form of time-consuming work-before-work is also uncompensated and unaffordable.

silencing

Usage

“...have seen how these institutions silence artists ...”

Normal meaning

Used as a verb, this means to prohibit or stop someone from speaking.

What the institution meant

In this instance, the requirement to be silent was not expressly articulated by the institutions referred to. Instead artists were silenced from fear of **blacklisting** or from signing a Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA). In both cases, the institutions require artists to self-police what they say so as not to cause conflict, difficulties or a sense of discomfort either within the working environment or publicly. What is conflicting, difficult or uncomfortable is often defined by what the institution finds challenging to its own sensibilities. It requires artists to be silent on various matters so as not to cause discomfort to the institution while tolerating their own discomfort of unfairness or inequality.

Some NDAs have very extensive confidentiality clauses that apply a gag to very wide circumstances. In this instance, the NDA used ceases to be a way of protecting privacy or confidentiality but rather it becomes a means of creating secrecy.

Silencing, as an proactive institutional act, can also be considered a counterpoint to **ghosting**, a retracting institutional act, where institutions silence themselves on a particular matter in order to erase or forget it.

What this means ethically

In institutions where there is a culture of silence, an atmosphere of uncertainty and precarity prevails. Artists constantly have to guess what the boundaries and rules of the silence are. They have to spend emotional and creative energy navigating the rules of silence which are also likely to be changeable. Because this silence is a form of self-censure or self-policing, there is no relief from the pressure of the requirement of silencing because one cannot get away from oneself

symbolic

Usage

“I was told I was being paid a symbolic fee”

Normal meaning

A symbol is a sign that goes beyond straightforward representation. A sign is a representation in that it stands for something else, and its function is to point to that thing. For example, a road sign depicting silhouettes of children is a sign that there might be children about. The road sign isn't, of course, the actual children. The sign stands in for the children and points to their likely actual presence.

A symbol is a sign, except that the meaning it offers is often complex, dynamic, contested and evolving. For example, a marriage may be signed by a marriage certificate but symbolised by wedding rings. The certificate is more like 'sign as straightforward representation'. It stands in for the relationship and points to it like a road sign. However, the wedding rings, while being signs too, act as symbols of marriage that presents an ever emerging dynamic of interactions, like love, commitment, aspiration, social acceptance, faith, survival, etc.

What the institution meant

“low fee”

When something is described as being 'symbolic', the question arises: what is the object symbolic of? What is it an icon of?

If an institution greatly overpays someone for work done and calls it a

'symbolic fee', one could surmise that this was a sign of deep respect and appreciation. The converse would also be true. If an institution greatly underpays someone for work done and calls it a 'symbolic fee', this fee would be a sign of disrespect and under-appreciation.

Further, for a fee to be a symbol, it or its amount would have to have symbolic meaning. For example, a fee that comprises multiples of 18 would be a symbolic fee in Jewish culture because the number 18 symbolises life. In Chinese culture, a fee of £888 would be considered a payment that symbolises good luck and wealth because '8' in many Chinese languages is a homonym for 'fortune'. Unless there were a set of numbers that held particular symbolic meaning to the institution, and then it used that number as a fee to pay the artist, this 'symbolic fee' is likely just to be a misnomer and actually means 'low fee' or simply 'fee'.

What this means ethically

By using this term, the institution is directing the artist or freelancer towards obtaining payment from the symbolic value of the fee. Aside from the fact that it is ethically dubious to pay for services with symbols, the symbolic meaning being offered as payment is a negative one, namely disrespect, devaluing and under appreciation. This is not only rude, but this kind of practice, if endemic, erodes artists' survivability, self-worth and health and would ultimately be detrimental to the resilience and health of the arts landscape.

“I raised the issue of the low **fee** (relative to the profile of the commission, the workload and the duration of the project) and was told I was lucky as previous artists had received less”

- **SECTION 3 -**
CONCLUSIONS AND
SUGGESTIONS

CONCLUSIONS

This inquiry set out to shed light on the current state of artists' pay in the public sector made apparent through the *Artist Leaks* data. From the many and varied testimonies submitted, there came a pervasive sense of exhaustion and injustice. As such, these are the main issues we feel need addressing to improve conditions for artists:

- **1 — Artists working in the public sector often earn less than minimum wage and sometimes are not paid at all**

The experiences of *Artist Leaks* contributors highlighted the precarity of artists' lives. The median hourly pay in the data worked out at just £2.60. In particular, artist fees for exhibition-making and commissions bore no relation to the amount of work undertaken. Artist fees given as 'lump sums' obscure the reality of hourly rates, shielding both the artist and commissioner from comparison to the minimum wage.



2 — It is artists' 'in-kind' labour that is subsidising a financially-strapped sector

The disparity between median artists' hourly pay from the *Artist Leaks* data, and the minimum wage, let alone a genuine living wage, demonstrates something of the scale of the labour artists are 'donating' to the public sector. As Robert Hewison has written, "it is not the Arts Council that subsidises the arts, it is the artists."³⁷

3 — Artists' labour is undervalued and underpaid

The sub-minimum wage pay received by a majority of the *Artist Leaks* contributors was accompanied in many instances by testimonies which cited other kinds of poor treatment. These included late payment, lack of respect for time and boundaries, unrealistic expectations, false promises, suggestions that the honour of working with the institution should be remuneration enough, often accompanied by a fundamental lack of care and consideration. Along with the endurance of low fees, this dynamic of disrespect led to artists experiencing burn out and contemplating dropping out of the 'art world' altogether.

³⁷ Hewison, R. (2021), *Freelance workers are the backbone of the art world—but how are they expected to survive on a pittance?* The Art Newspaper, 5 March. Available at: <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2021/03/05/freelance-workers-are-the-backbone-of-the-art-world-but-how-are-they-expected-to-survive-on-a-pittance> (Accessed: 14 September 2022).

4 — Art-making is particularly poorly paid

The production of new work and exhibition-making were among the lowest paid kinds of artistic labour recorded in *Artist Leaks*. This data pointed towards a pervasive sense that the public art sector upholds the art market's idea that the value of art is located in the art object, rather than its production and its social value. More 'visible' activities like workshops and facilitating tended to be better remunerated.

5 — Bad pay for artists means a homogeneous and elitist 'art world'

The burden of intersectional precarity associated with discrimination on the basis of gender and/or caring, race, and disability was clearly displayed throughout the testimonies. The over-arching precarity of artists' livelihoods means that those left with less security due to the structural inequalities of society are more likely to burn out and drop out, whilst those with assets that insulate them from financial instability are the ones enabled to persevere. Ultimately, this perpetuates a narrow public 'art world' that cedes its territory to the rich.

SUGGESTIONS

A transformation of society!

Ultimately, the conditions explored in this report stem from chronic underfunding of the public art sector and, more broadly, the erosion of public services and the social safety net in the UK since the 1970s. The case for publicly funding the arts, to us, means going beyond a project-by-project basis and moving towards a culture and society that supports and values creative lives, with an end to precarious working conditions for all.

The ‘elective precarity’ of being an artist does not mean artists should accept and expect unstable and unsustainable living conditions. To do so (especially out of middle- or upper-class embarrassment) undermines fellow artists who, in the absence of a financial buffer, require fair pay to sustain themselves. It also reinforces the gates that keep out would-be artists before their careers have even begun, so acutely articulated by Lola Olufemi at the start of this inquiry.

If the solutions we call for focus solely on a major increase in funding for the arts, we ignore the fact that artists’ precarity comes not only from poor artist pay and a shortage of opportunities, but also from the wider instability caused by the spiralling cost of living and a threadbare system of state support. Like other low-paid, gig economy workers, the majority of artists whose incomes sit well below national averages (apart from those for whom this is supplemented by inherited wealth) are exposed to the risk of not being able to afford the basics, let alone sustain their practices.

As the cost of living rises and wages (and artist fees) remain stagnant, this risk only increases.

³⁸ Bray, J. (2022) *More than 9,000 artists apply for universal basic income scheme*, The Irish Times, 21 May. Available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/more-than-9-000-artists-apply-for-universal-basic-income-scheme-1.4884208> (Accessed: 14 September 2022)

One solution that recently began trials is the Basic Income for the Arts pilot in Ireland, which sees a weekly unconditional payment of 325 euros given to 2000 artists.³⁸ Whilst a seductive possibility, from our perspective,

a basic income model which posits artists as an exceptional subset of precarious workers risks fracturing worker solidarity and privileges one kind of under-remunerated workforce over others. A truly Universal Basic Income, or Universal Basic Services, with the promise of covering the basic

material needs of all citizens, including housing, utilities, food, transport, health and social care, childcare and higher education, would eliminate this distinction. There are arguments over which is most effective,³⁹ but a context in which everyone’s basic needs are fulfilled would eliminate the burden of precarity on artists, along with everyone else. This might seem a far-fetched ideal, given the current political climate, but it feels crucial to hold on tight to these possibilities in order to orient and galvanise our thinking.

³⁹ Marx, P. (2020) *The Limits of Basic Income*, Tribune, 15 June. Available at: <https://tribunemag.co.uk/2020/06/the-limits-of-basic-income> (Accessed 15 June 2022).

While we keep our gaze fixed on the horizon of radical societal change, and agitate for it wherever possible, there is plenty of ‘meantime work’ to be done to address the urgent and immediate changes needed to make a fairer and more equitable ‘art world’. All of the suggestions below relate directly to the conditions highlighted by this inquiry. These include the crucial work that needs to be done by those with directional power within institutions, organisations, and commissioning bodies, as well as shifts that artists themselves can advocate for collectively, in a spirit of mutual aid and solidarity.

THE MEANTIME WORK FOR INSTITUTIONS

1 — Institutions and commissioners need to publicly make the case for increased funding

In an online conversation at Towner Eastbourne with Helen Cammock in February 2021, Tai Shani asked the question “where are the directors – where are they?”⁴⁰ Shani’s question speaks to the palpable exhaustion in the *Artist Leaks* testimonies from artists who have repeatedly had to advocate for their basic needs, often only to be met with little or no movement from the institution. While politically-engaged artists give voice to the dire state of public arts funding, there is a feeling that institutions and commissioners mete out ever-diminishing funds without adequately sounding the alarm

⁴⁰ Shani, T. and Cammock, H. (2021) *Talking Loud*, Towner Eastbourne, 18 February. Available to watch at: <https://townereastbourne.org.uk/learn/watch/talking-loud-helen-cammock-and-tai-shani> (Accessed: 14 September 2022).

and publicly disrupting the austerity narratives that drive cuts. To make structural change possible within the sector, we clearly need directors, trustees and other stakeholders with power to agitate with us, both loudly and publicly.

2 — We need a radical shift towards transparency

Under the weight of the *Artist Leaks* data, Tate's contention that it is not 'in their commercial interest' to publish their artist fees points towards an intentional opacity that pervades the sector, where low fees are deliberately kept under wraps in order to shield institutions' reputations, while preventing artists from arming themselves with the knowledge to collectively negotiate better pay and conditions.

Clearly, even within the linguistic confines of a response to a Freedom of Information request, a public institution wielding 'commercial interest' as a valid excuse not to reveal its low rates of pay should ring alarm bells. A public sector serious about supporting a thriving art community for all must commit to operating with transparency and openness. In response to the *Artist Leaks* data and testimonies, these key points stand out as crucial steps towards this:

— Publish budgets and pay structures and re-evaluate artist fees in relation to employees' pay and salaries

Contextualising the data gathered through *Artist Leaks* against the minimum wage revealed the extent to which artists are expected to donate their labour in a kind of coercive philanthropy. An initial step in working transparently against this mechanism is to publish the pay structures for both artists and staff, alongside programming and production budgets. Eastside Projects in Birmingham have taken this laudable step, giving an insight into how the gallery is run and where artists and staff fit into the picture – including fixed minimum fees for artists for solo exhibitions to fees for artist talks.⁴¹

⁴¹ Eastside Projects publish information on their artists fees here: <https://eastsideprojects.org/about/texts/> and their staff wages here: <https://eastsideprojects.org/people/> (Accessed: 14 September 2022).

How would it look, for instance, if Tate were to publish their staff and artist pay on their website too – including the £198,010 salary entitlement of its director, the £27,936 median wage across the institution,⁴² the £19,750 wage of a Membership and Ticketing services Assistant,⁴³ and the £1000 artist fee for a solo exhibition of new work at Tate Britain, which the artist worked on for a year?

⁴² This information is available in The Board of Trustees of the Tate Gallery Annual Accounts 2020-21, available to view here: https://www.tate.org.uk/documents/50/the_board_of_trustees_of_the_tate_gallery_annual_accounts_2020-21.pdf (Accessed: 14 September 2022).

⁴³ The yearly wage for a front of house job on the ticket desk at Tate Britain, as advertised in 2019: <https://workingat.tate.org.uk/files.axd?id=826bd1d8-7eea-4864-95d7-414f284bf423> (Accessed: 14 September 2022).

Publishing and re-evaluating artists' pay in light of institutional pay structures begins to address the inequities between the scale of budgets, the pay of 'senior' staff and those towards the bottom of the scale including artists, freelancers and low paid or outsourced workers.

W.A.G.E. (Working Artists and the Greater Economy) is an artist-run organisation in the USA that offers another example of these types of calculations in action. Their fee calculator sets an industry-wide minimum, which is then re-calculated according to the total annual operating budget of the institution.⁴⁴ See **Appendix 6** for a full record of the budget and fees for the production of this inquiry.

⁴⁴ The yearly wage for a front of house job on the ticket desk at Tate Britain, as advertised in 2019: <https://workingat.tate.org.uk/files.axd?id=826bd1d8-7eea-4864-95d7-414f284bf423> (Accessed: 14 September 2022).

— Break down artists' 'lump sums' into hourly and daily rates

Re-presenting artist fees as hourly and daily rates shows how much of an artist's time has actually been budgeted for, rather than allowing lump sums or 'honorariums' to decouple labour from pay. Even if the commissioner cannot immediately rectify the situation, in the event that the work done and the fee do not correspond at the end of the project, both the artist and the commissioner are made aware of the 'in-kind' labour performed by the artist.

The tendency to pay artists in 'lump sums' can also interfere with state support payments, and cause artists to lose out on benefits they are entitled to. The 'lump sum' makes assumptions about class and can prevent artists from applying for or taking on commissions. Breaking down lump sums and finding more flexible ways to pay artists according to their requirements as standard would also remove this barrier.

— Re-balance production budgets and artists' fees so that the value of artists' labour is prioritised over maximising the scale of artistic outcomes

Commissioners must ensure that artists are not bearing the brunt of streamlined budgets whilst the ambition and scale of exhibitions and projects are protected from funding cuts.

The most urgent and specific demand we want to draw out from this inquiry, however is this:

3 — Commissioners must commit immediately to paying artists at least minimum wage (and work towards an artists' and freelancers' living wage)

Institutions and funders must recalibrate their structures and budgets to ensure artists are paid at least minimum wage throughout the projects they commission. Beyond the totally inadequate limits of the current UK minimum wage in our present economic crisis, the Trades Union Congress has recently followed the US labour movement in launching a Fight for £15⁴⁵ – a campaign to collectively bargain towards £15 per hour as the new minimum wage. In our opinion, any 'progressive' cultural sector should be fighting to adopt this for all workers alongside its artists at a minimum.

⁴⁵ More information about the campaign can be found here: <https://www.tuc.org.uk/campaigns/fight-for-15> (Accessed: 14 September 2022).

It is alarming that this demand needs to be made at all, and even more so to have to acknowledge that some institutions would balk at the shortfall

in their budgets that this basic commitment would entail. It is simply unacceptable and untenable for artists to have to fight for a minimum wage, let alone a living wage.

Alongside and beyond this minimum commitment, urgent work therefore needs to be undertaken towards arriving at, and officially implementing, an agreed industry standard rate that takes into account the precarity of being self-employed, as well as the additional overheads shouldered by artists, such as studio rent.

Ultimately, these changes will require institutions to audit themselves carefully, reconsider their priorities, and communicate with artists and freelancers to recognise and work to what is possible within existing budgets. These strategies suggest ways to begin the work of making transparent what is *actually* possible with current levels of cultural funding; drawing attention to the 'dark matter' of unpaid labour that has been subsidising visual arts in the public sector, as a way to prepare the ground for more fundamental change and make the necessary case for increased and re-distributed funding.

THE MEANTIME WORK FOR ARTISTS

While the lions' share of the work needs to be undertaken by institutions and funders, keeping sight of our position in relation to our fellow artists and other precarious workers is a crucial part of the push for a more equitable (art) world. These (by no-means exhaustive) suggestions have been gathered from the *Artist Leaks* testimonies and our wider discussions with artists.

1 — Join a union!

Despite also experiencing precarity, actors and musicians generally benefit from better pay in part because of greater levels of unionisation within their industries. As the membership of artists' unions increases, our bargaining power for better pay and conditions will grow. Links to unions for artists are included below. Membership of unions often also include benefits like Public Liability Insurance and legal and tax advice.

Artists' Union England: <https://www.artistsunionengland.org.uk>

Scottish Artists Union: <https://www.artistsunion.scot>

Praxis – Artists' Union of Ireland: <https://www.praxisunion.ie>

2 — Keep an artist's time diary

“Keep a timesheet, especially if you're being paid a lump sum that seems huge to you as an artist but is tiny in comparison with what the employed staff get and what you have to deliver. Set your day rate and then stop working or renegotiate when you've hit the limit. Funders and directors have no clue what the work actually takes and it's easy for them to outsource politics, conflicts and logistics to you.”

As artists, we are consistently expected to do too much with too little, or are motivated to overwork in relation to the funding or fee we are given in order to show the best work we can. Keeping a time diary means we can be transparent with ourselves and commissioners about the shortfall in our pay, and begin to push back against it.

3 — Protect yourself with a contract

Jack Ky Tan's easy-read artist contract is a brilliant resource to draw on if bad practice from your commissioner means you are not presented with a contract at the beginning of your engagement, or are given a contract written in dense legal language. It also requests a clear breakdown of the budget and artists fee:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1WUvX-g5M6ClavSYtU3pEyAyELdETQ7O0lONTp84agll/edit>

¹⁰ Create London (2018), *Panic! Social Class, Taste and Inequalities in the Creative Industries*, pp. 3–10. Available at: <https://createlondon.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Panic-Social-Class-Taste-and-Inequalities-in-the-Creative-Industries1.pdf> (Accessed: 14 September 2022).

4 — Stop performing success and working for free, and keep speaking out about bad experiences

“Talk to fellow artists, do not suffer alone.”

It should not be artists' individualised responsibility to shoulder the burden of negotiating better pay and conditions for each project undertaken (especially when that expectation favours those from backgrounds and schooling designed to bolster their confidence in doing so). That said, a culture of transparency between artists, and of artists asking for better conditions on behalf of one another and not just individually, begins to collectivise the problem and pull at the edges of the status quo.

Despite evidence to the contrary, myths of meritocracy in the 'art world' remain pervasive.¹⁰ Maintaining this illusion in such a patchy and inconsistent sector, which relies so heavily on personal networks and existing social hierarchies, serves to individualise 'failure' in a system in which most young artists are already set up to 'fail'. To begin to counter them, we as artists need to be collectively more honest about the nature and terms of our struggles and successes, as well as the factors that enable our resilience.

In what is essentially an attention economy, turning down even unpaid work can feel challenging, but the more we formally and informally collectivise and push back, the easier it will become.

*Publishing this inquiry does not mark the end of the Artist Leaks project – **the form will remain open** and be updated to build an ever-expanding database of artists' experiences as one amongst many ways to multiply artist-to-artist solidarity, bringing clarity to the true state of our working conditions and making the case for the change we so urgently need.*

BIOGRAPHIES

Charlotte Warne Thomas (she/they) is an artist, writer, researcher and parent based in South East London. Her work investigates and articulates the relationships between labour, care and love, drawing on historical and personal narratives to interrogate the visibility and value of different kinds of work. Her recent report *Artists as Workers* examined the working conditions of contemporary artists, shedding light on precarious livelihoods, low pay, and class barriers in the 'art world'. Charlotte is a practice-based PhD AHRC candidate at Kingston University and co-founder of [Peer Sessions](#), a long-running artists' crit group providing an inclusive space for artist education using 'synthetic thinking'. For the sake of transparency, she is a privately educated white woman, from a middle class background.

Jack Ky Tan uses law, policy, social norms and customs as a medium of making art. He creates performances, sculpture and participatory projects that highlight the rules that guide human behaviour. In Jack's social practice, he blurs the boundaries between art, governance and consultancy in order to help organisations reform and revision themselves using artistic thinking. Jack trained as a lawyer and worked in civil rights NGOs before becoming an artist. Jack's practice-led [PhD](#) at Roehampton University explored legal aesthetics and performance art. He has taught sculpture at the Royal College of Art and University of Brighton, and politics at Goldsmiths.

Juliet Jacques is a writer, filmmaker, broadcaster and academic based in London. She has published four books, including *Trans: A Memoir* (2015) and a short story collection, *Variations* (2021). Her fiction, journalism and essays have appeared in *The Guardian* (including her 'Transgender Journey' column, longlisted for the Orwell Prize in 2011), *New York Times*, *Frieze*, *London Review of Books* and many other publications; her short films have screened in galleries and festivals across the world. She also teaches at the Royal College of Art and elsewhere, and hosted the arts discussion programme *Suite (212)* on Resonance 104.4fm.



Artists' Union England banner Photo: Artists' Union England

Lola Olufemi (she/they) is a black feminist writer and Stuart Hall foundation researcher from London based in the Centre for Research and Education in Art and Media at the University of Westminster. Her work focuses on the uses of the feminist imagination and its relationship to cultural production, political demands and futurity. She is author of *Feminism Interrupted: Disrupting Power* (Pluto Press, 2020), *Experiments in Imagining Otherwise* (Hajar Press, 2021) and a member of *bare minimum*, an interdisciplinary anti-work arts collective.

Rose Nordin is an artist and graphic designer based between London, UK and Maastricht, NL. Through her practice and research, Rose explores the publication as a site of exchange and collaboration, print technologies as tools for union, and letterforms as modes of magic.

Appendix 1

Further resources, groups, and organisations:

Art for UBI (manifesto):

<https://instituteofradicalimagination.org/the-school-of-mutation-2020/som-iterations/art-for-ubi/>

Artists as Workers: a report (2021) Charlotte Warne Thomas:

<https://autonomy.work/portfolio/artistsasworkers/>

Artistic Lives: A Study of Creativity in Two European Cities (2016) Kristen Forkert: <https://www.perlego.com/book/1632671/artistic-lives-a-study-of-creativity-in-two-european-cities-pdf> (available to read online here with a free trial subscription).

Artist Parents: <http://www.artist-parents.com/more/>

A Nation of Shopkeepers, Dan Evans, Repeater Radio (2021) – a series of conversations re-examining class structures in the UK, building a new understanding as a basis for socialist organising:

<https://www.soundcloud.com/repeater-radio/sets/a-nation-of-shopkeepers-with>

Barbican Stories: <https://www.barbicanstories.com>

bare minimum: https://substack.com/profile/14069854-bare-minimum?utm_source=account-card

Carrot Workers Collective: <https://carrotworkers.wordpress.com/about/>

Dr. Susan Jones' body of writing and research 'around the complex, fraught relationship between artists' livelihoods, arts policy and contemporary visual arts infrastructures': <https://padwickjonesarts.co.uk/>

FRANK: <https://frankfairartistpay.com/>

IN KIND: <https://inkindproject.net>

La Buse: <https://la-buse.org/>

Notes From Below is an online socialist publication following the method of 'workers' inquiry', a definition we have drawn on in understanding 'Structurally F-cked' as an inquiry too:

<https://notesfrombelow.org/what-is-workers-inquiry>

Precarious Workers Brigade:

<https://precariousworkersbrigade.tumblr.com>

Take the Money and Run?, Jane Trowell and Platform:

https://www.thisliveart.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/TaketheMoneyRun_Final-copy.pdf

The White Pube, Ideas for a new art world:

<https://thewhitepube.co.uk/blog/ideas-for-a-new-art-world/>

W.A.G.E.:

<https://www.wageforwork.com/home#top>

WAGES FOR WAGES AGAINST:

<https://www.wagesforwagesagainst.org/en>

What Can Art Galleries Teach Us About Class Oppression,

Nathalie Olah, Novara Media:

<https://soundcloud.com/novaramedia/what-can-art-galleries-teach-us-about-class-oppression-w-nathalie-olah>

Appendix 2

industria

ARTIST LEAKS

Artist fees in UK (and Ireland) public art institutions:

We've noticed that large institutions fail to disclose their artist fees and production budgets, stating that it's not in their 'commercial interest' to make this information public when asked for this data via FOI requests. We think it is in all our interests, as artists, to get a clear picture of where specific fees fit into wider structures.

The form is anonymous but all your answers will be collated and published on our website in due course.

Any data you are able to contribute will help to build up the information available in the public domain.

In order to protect artists anonymity, we will be scrambling the order of the answers and staggering their release on our website, so if you submit several exhibitions these will not appear in succession.

You can view the results so far here:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1WDMSt8uKjpnMU18m62uQEIZoErd6HLnxfKR7EPNrYmM/edit#gid=0>



Name of institution (please indicate N/A if you are not comfortable to disclose)

Your answer

Please also indicate the region it's based in: *

Choose

Please indicate the rough scale of the institution (if you're unable to name names * this will help us sort the data)

(We've roughly grouped these based on the amount of Arts Council Funding they receive as NPOs, or funding through the DCMS. Your best guess is fine!):

Choose

When did the commission / exhibition take place? *

- 2015–present
- 2010–2014
- 2005–2009
- 2000–2004
- 1990–1999
- 1980–1999
- 1970–1979

How much was the artist fee? *

Your answer

How much was the production budget? If you weren't told, please indicate 'not disclosed' *

Your answer

Short description of the scale and scope of the commission – as much or as little * information as you are comfortable to give – e.g large solo show, outdoor commission, public workshop, performance evening

Your answer

How long do you estimate you spent working on the commission on a full-time * basis?

Your answer

What kinds of work and resources did the institution/ commissioner expect your * artist fee to cover?

- Attending meetings
- Presenting proposals
- Research and development
- Time spent producing work
- Production costs and materials
- Production management
- Installing the work and supervising install
- De-installing the work and supervising de-install
- Cost of studio space for production of the work
- Wages for artists' assistants
- Other:

Was there a separate access budget available in addition to the fee / production budget? *

- Yes
- No
- Don't know
- Other:

Your age at the time of the commission *

- 20-25
- 26-30
- 31-40
- 41-50
- 51-60
- 60+

Number of years working as an artist at the time of the commission *

- 1-5
- 5-10
- 11-20
- 21-30
- 30+

Do you feel you were paid fairly for your time your time and experience? *

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Do you feel you were paid fairly in relation to how others working on the project were paid (ie. curators and technicians) *

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Did your pay feel proportionate to the scale of the project? *

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Any other comments you would like to add (This is where you can expand on your experience. We may quote your words as part of our reporting of Artist Leaks)

Your answer

Please tell us your gender (if you feel comfortable to)

Your answer

Please tell how you define your race / ethnicity (if you feel comfortable to)

Your answer

Submit

Appendix 3

Table of comparison between *Artist Leaks* median hourly pay, UK minimum and living wages, and Artists' Union England recommended hourly pay:



Median hourly artist pay calculated from the <i>Artist Leaks</i> data (spanning 2010–2022)	£2.60
U.K. minimum wage, as of April 2022	£9.50
U.K. living wage 2021–2022	£9.90
Artists' Union England suggested hourly rate for newly graduated artists, August 2021	£22.69
Artists' Union England suggested hourly rate for artists with 5+ years experience, August 2021	£35.02

Appendix 4

Tables of average pay calculated from the *Artist Leaks* data, separated by type of labour

Daily pay

	All types of artistic labour	Workshops/Talks/ Facilitation	All other types of artistic labour <small>(eg. production of work exhibition-making)</small>
Mean day rate	£52.19	£181.30	£30.60
Median day rate	£20.83	£90.00	£15.00

Hourly pay

	All types of artistic labour	Workshops/Talks/ Facilitation	All other types of artistic labour <small>(eg. production of work exhibition-making)</small>
Mean hourly rate	£6.52	£22.66	£3.83
Median hourly rate	£2.60	£11.25	£1.88

Percentages of hourly rates of pay in the *Artist Leaks* data which fell below the 2015, 2017, and 2022 minimum wages, separated by type of labour:

	All types of artistic labour	Workshops/Talks/ Facilitation	All other types of artistic labour <small>(eg. production of work exhibition-making)</small>
2015 minimum wage (£6.70/hr)	78%	33%	87%
2017 minimum wage (£8.75/hr)	82%	40%	90%
2022 minimum wage (£9.50/hr)	82%	40%	91%

Appendix 5

We reached the figure of £7.63 as a 'weighted average' minimum wage for the years covered by the *Artist Leaks* data by finding the mean minimum wage for each bracket of time respondents could select to indicate when their experience took place (eg. £5.49 as the mean minimum wage for the years 2005–2009). We then followed the calculations shown in the table below to use each of these values to calculate an overall mean minimum wage, weighted proportionally to the number of entries in each of these categories.

	Mean minimum wage	Number of entries recorded	(Number of entries in each category ÷ 103) x mean minimum wage for each category
2005–2009	£5.49	2	£0.11
2010–2014	£6.20	10	£0.60
2015–2020	£7.69	50	£3.73
2015–Feb 2022	£8.01	41	£3.19
Total:		103	£7.63

Appendix 6

In order to demonstrate what increased transparency in terms of pay structures might look like, here we include a full financial breakdown for this project, including the commissioning budget from a-n and the fees allocated to all participants.

	Number of days/output	Rate of pay (based on recommended Artists' Union England rates at time of working)	Additional costs	Total paid
Industria 1	24.5	11 days at £230.21 13.5 days at £250.24		£5910.55
Industria 2	24.5	11 days at £230.21 13.5 days at £250.24		£5910.55
Editor	6.5	4 days at £230.21 2.5 days at £250.24	£50 initial meeting	£1596.44
Graphic designer	4.3	4.3 days at £250.24	plus 3 days overtime paid separately by Industria at the same rate	£1075.58
Commissioned writers (x3)	1–2 days approx 2000 word commission	£400 (with additional contingency budget available by arrangement)	£100 contingency for length of commission	£1300.00
Total funding from a-n				£15793.12

Being paid at Artists' Union England recommended rates for our work on this report was a revelation. It meant that we felt fully supported on our intermittent work on this project over the course of a year. We are grateful to a-n for their flexibility in funding the project and working with us to revise the budget as the project developed and expanded.

**STRUCTURALLY
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industria a·n