

## **Wellbeing as a responsibility of the arts: Are our institutions in a fit state to take on the responsibility of public mental health care?**

A crisis is emerging in arts institutions. I am witnessing an increasing number of mental health issues in cultural workers that in some cases are leading to breakdowns. (Teresa Cisneros, 2018, p.6)

### **Introduction**

This essay moves towards questioning the impact of the embedding of the wellbeing agenda in galleries and museums. How this has manifested, its risks and potential impact on staff, participants, on art making, artistic practice and the broader field. I draw on the history and workings of the institution and the arts, using the Whitechapel Gallery as a starting point, a site where ideas of community engagement were made tangible during the work of Jenni Lomax in the late 1970's. I explore the current moves towards introducing a programme of wellbeing at the gallery, considering this within the wider museum/gallery context and current fallout of the effects of the events of the past year on public mental health. I aim to focus on the tensions I see between the museum<sup>1</sup> as a public space whose role shifts and changes according to Government policy, funding constraints, wider trends and shifts in museum theory, audience interest and need alongside the illusive egalitarian aims of public provision, access to education and development of cultural capital. On the ground within all of this are the people who work to support the museums reach, to uphold the funding remits, who connect with audiences within these constraints and either flourish or face disillusionment depending on their lived experience and their conscience.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this essay I use the terms galleries and museums, relating them both to the broader institution of the Museum

I poignantly have researched and written this essay in my last 2 months of employment as Curator of Learning and Wellbeing at iniva (institute of international visual arts)<sup>2</sup> having handed in my notice to leave due to mental health challenges. This framing cannot help but influence this essay, as I consider my own role and my personal experience within the institutions in which I have worked. In addition, my thinking is shaped by ideas of how my personal practice of community engagement can develop post iniva.

Throughout this essay, I draw on museum and new institutionalist theory alongside an underlying constant framework of Critical Race Theory and interviews with three peers who work in arts and health.

### **Personal positioning: art and art therapy**

I have worked for just shy of four years on art therapy informed visual arts programmes at iniva - programmes that can sit under the category of 'wellbeing'. I previously delivered arts and creative programmes with young people excluded from the mainstream and worked within museums and both small and large arts education institutions. At iniva, I have navigated the planning and delivery of integrated art and art therapy projects<sup>3</sup>, working through the difficulties and successes of bringing together these two disciplines. It might seem that this marrying of fields should be a straightforward one, they are closely related after all and many artists choose later to become art therapists. However, this merging of professions and the progression of the model has not been easy, with challenges around interpretation, authorship, control, pride, personality and intersectionality appearing throughout. It has however, been worth it and I have seen the positive impacts on both facilitators and participants, with the projects described by participants as 'vital' and 'so

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<sup>2</sup> Relevant to this topic is the shift of my job title to Curator of Learning and Wellbeing from my previous title of Project Manager. This was in part to align terminology around roles with other arts organisations and apparently to better describe my job role, however this was not initiated by me, sits uncomfortably and was questioned by me.

<sup>3</sup> See [iniva.org/learning](https://iniva.org/learning)

important for mental health'. A particular bonus has been that the inherent nature of reflection and processing of understanding in art therapy has meant that when things have gone wrong or have been challenging, valuable and deeply felt learning opportunities can be recognised and worked through without the otherwise necessary sense of failure or fault.

For myself as organiser, observer, facilitator and participant, this process has resulted in nuanced and new levels of understanding that will continue to interject into how I frame my arts education projects going forward. As mentioned, I have used this essay to begin to think through my continued place within this field, to explore how the naming of programmes as 'wellbeing' might impact those who attend such programmes, what they might create and their continued relationship with contemporary art.

### **The Whitechapel Gallery**

During the module of study, Spaces of Practice, we were introduced to the Swarovski Foundation's curator of learning Renee Odjidja who manages and delivers the gallery's youth programme and youth forum Duchamp & Sons<sup>4,5</sup>. The Whitechapel has a solid history of community and youth engagement, recently explored in their exhibition Exercising Freedom<sup>6</sup>. A podcast that accompanied the exhibition featured Jenni Lomax discussing her involvement with the development of the Whitechapel's education programme between 1979 – 1989 alongside artists involved at the time. What is apparent is how connected to

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.whitechapelgallery.org/learn/youth/>

<sup>5</sup> As an aside, the use of the sponsor's name Swarovski to head up both the curator's title and the programme also adds an interesting layer to what is expected of the programme, who the gatekeepers are and surely removes some of the 'freedom' that might have been more inherent in the education programmes of earlier years.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.whitechapelgallery.org/exhibitions/exercising-freedom/>

the local community the programmes of that time were, how they managed to connect the artists living and working in the local area to the communities they lived beside.

I think for everyone really embracing this new community of local artists that had become part of gallery life, and listening to their conversations and their ideas...it really shaped, began to shape the programme... I think the Whitechapel programme showed the way that, if the organisation embraced what this could mean, and lost its preconceptions about gallery education, that all sorts of things could happen, you know, that could feed into the programme that made the life of the Gallery richer and the life of the community richer.

Jenni Lomax, *Exercising Freedom: Encounters with Art, Artists and Communities*, 6 Oct 2020 – 21 Mar 2021

It is interesting to note that within Whitechapel's current Youth Forum, young people attend from across London, moving away from the immediacy and the closeness of the community surrounding the gallery. This could speak to a lack of provision (or deemed by the participant to be equivalent provision) elsewhere, the Whitechapel's own local connections<sup>7</sup> and how the gallery is otherwise perceived.<sup>8</sup>

The programme is presented as highly successful, enabling young people to engage, shape, create and deliver projects that respond to or draw from the gallery's exhibitions, space and expertise. Renee's role is clearly a central part of this success, evidenced by comments around the extra care and support she already provides for the young people she works with in terms of pastoral and practical life support. The module interactions with Renee were based around her forthcoming plans to develop a wellbeing programme as an extension or integral part of the youth programme. Renee spoke about her interest in

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<sup>7</sup> I have to acknowledge however that the Youth Programme is one aspect of their offer and doesn't necessarily reflect the audience make up of the gallery as a whole.

<sup>8</sup> For example if the community does not feel included or represented elsewhere within the gallery programmes they are less likely to support their young people in attending. Previous comments by curators at the gallery have hinted at a disjuncture that demonstrates a lack of understanding of the community they serve.

partnering with therapists or art therapists to support the delivery of this work which I was interested to hear, as it mirrors the work that I have been doing and could provide opportunities to share experiences and support within what can often be a lonely and woefully unsupported role within the museum.

In response to a question around the reasons behind the need for the wellbeing programme in a follow up interview, with the implicit suggestion that funding and policy might have had an impact, Renee did not agree, stating “I’m responding to what the young people I work with are asking for.” I suggest however that there are multiple reasons why these young people are looking to the museum for this kind of support.

Analysis by YMCA England & Wales found that since 2010/11, spending on youth services in England has reduced by £959m, with local authority spending dropping from £1,357m in 2010/11 to £398m in 2018/19 – equivalent to a 71 per cent cut. (Puffett, N, 2020)

The fact that these young people have been able to voice their needs and ask for support from Renee / the Duchamp & Sons programme, is a testament to her ability to connect with them and to the real success of creating a space that can provide these opportunities. I am curious, if looked at with an evaluation framework specifically geared to examining wellbeing, whether the previous years of Duchamp & Sons would demonstrate that the young people’s wellbeing is already being supported, even met. Perhaps crucially for impact (on both participant and gallery) and for box ticking it has not been named as such. More importantly here, I argue that the factors that have driven the young people to asking the gallery for this provision is because they are not finding this support elsewhere due to

the devastating cuts to mental health care (see TUC report 2018)<sup>9</sup> and youth services<sup>10</sup> over the last 10 years.

### **Policy, Funding, Osmosis**

Alongside these cuts, the wellbeing agenda in the arts has been floated and promoted for a number of years now, not least by Arts Council England<sup>11</sup>. In the UCL online training course developed in partnership with the Culture Health and Wellbeing alliance, also named Culture, Health and Wellbeing (initially entitled Museums for Wellbeing) lead Helen Chatterjee highlights that arts and health 'is a really big growth area for many organisations, not just museums and galleries.'<sup>12</sup> Again, a tension arises that pits the idea of the museum / gallery as a genuine space to 'exercise freedom'<sup>13</sup> and one that the Government makes use of in order to field, shepherd and shape the public, filling gaps in public services.

In the APPG report of 2017, the authors three key messages are:

- The arts can help keep us well, aid our recovery and support longer lives better lived.
- The arts can help meet major challenges facing health and social care: ageing, long- term conditions, loneliness and mental health.
- The arts can help save money in the health service and social care

These are grand and binding statements, with one that stands out as particularly attractive to certain authorities. The statements will also clearly help secure funding but also create

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<sup>9</sup> Breaking Point: the crisis in mental health funding

[https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Mentalhealthfundingreport2\\_0.pdf](https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Mentalhealthfundingreport2_0.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.cypnow.co.uk/news/article/youth-services-suffer-1bn-funding-cut-in-less-than-a-decade#:~:text=Analysis%20by%20YMCA%20England%20%26%20Wales,a%2071%20per%20cent%20cut.>

<sup>11</sup> See the 2018 ACE report: Arts and culture in health and wellbeing and in the criminal justice system

<sup>12</sup> See Film 3, Module 1

<sup>13</sup> Exercising Freedom, title of the Whitechapel Gallery exhibition

expectations of the arts to replace health services. Services that usually come with fully trained medical professionals, secure policies and embedded networks of support and referral.

I am not dismissing the arts ability to support these aims. Anyone who works in the arts, makes art, creates, visits or experiences the arts can provide testimony to how it offers a different space, an outlet, a support. The incredible response by arts organisations throughout the pandemic in providing creative outlets and community building online provided a crucial line of support at a time of great need, has been well documented. Most of the programmes offered that I have explored however, did not distinctly name their programme as a 'wellbeing' offer, though I suggest that is exactly what they were providing (myself included as we at iniva also continued to provide online, printed and downloadable projects throughout the pandemic).

Terms that become buzz words, policy words, whose meanings are ever-expanding come with a risk. That at some point we will lose sight of what the true aims are and fall back on a box ticking exercise that enables funding and perpetuates the existing inequalities that are so damaging and dangerous. I question what it means for the arts to further fragment our public creative offer under the title of 'wellbeing' and whether there might be better ways in which we can continue to do the work that we have always done in expanding minds, fostering creativity, making connections and supporting the development of critical thinking.

I have delivered education programmes for many years that have absolutely been about supporting the individual's development as a person, providing a means of expression and an outlet where they can find solace and support, but this has more often than not been done in a non-explicit way; one that focuses on the process of creativity, the experience of creativity, of critical discussion. I am unsure that when working with excluded and at-risk

young people, had I named my workshops 'fashion for wellbeing' whether it would have had the same impact, or indeed, whether I would have gotten anyone through the door. These young people's trust in anything reflective of school, authority and the mainstream had been completely eroded by repeatedly being let down – by literally being in life-or-death situations and not receiving the care or support they should have from either the system or society. This prompts questions of who will access these programmes within the galleries and museums and how will their longer term needs be met?

In discussion for this essay, Kate Pleydell, Arts Engagement Manager at Imperial Health Charity, raised the risk of participants dependency on programmes, that once they had joined they did not want to, or could not bring themselves to leave despite no longer fitting the criteria for the group. Is it then the groups responsibility to withdraw support? And what happens when the funding runs out? I have seen the affect first hand with my father in law, who experiences bipolar episodes. I can't express how much he gained from a local photography support group, however once funding was withdrawn, the group shut. It was the last thing I can remember him being actively interested in, that made him get up and go out. Nothing has replaced this service.

'Funding of the arts at its most upper echelons is almost entirely structured by political manoeuvring.' Jemma Desai, 2019 Chapter 1

This move towards further naming a wellbeing offer, led by Renee at the Whitechapel, is currently being replicated in other organisations<sup>14</sup> and is part of a much wider focus on 'wellbeing' that has been building for a number of years across society. This is evidenced by specific wellbeing subjects being added to the school curriculum<sup>15</sup> cemented by budgets

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<sup>14</sup> Through approach, discussion with colleagues I am aware of two other arts organisations in London who are currently developing art / art therapy, or art and psychotherapy linked programmes and resources

<sup>15</sup> Bold new plans set out today (Monday 25 February 2019) by the Education Secretary Damian Hinds confirm that, from September 2020, pupils of all ages will be taught the new subject. All children in England will be taught



allocated for teaching around the topic. In addition a variety of new staff programmes in health, rights and wellbeing have begun to emerge (at varying speeds) in the corporate and NFP world following the 2010 Equality Act. The act, details 9 protected characteristics, bringing into law obligations for companies and protection for workers against discrimination<sup>16</sup>. There is now an acute urgency felt in response to the exponential rise in mental health challenges related to the Covid 19 pandemic. A model produced by the Centre for Mental Health UK and the NHS, predicts that, ‘**up to 10 million people...will need either new or additional mental health support as a direct consequence of the crisis.**’ with an estimated 1.5 million of those being children<sup>17</sup>.

This is not hard to imagine from the impacts I see on my own personal network of friends and family. In addition, the mass mental health triggering of the murder of George Floyd and the kick-backs, arguments, naming and shaming, reliving of trauma that will continue to ripple and echo for all those affected for many years will further add to the growing need for available and accessible care. For even if and when positive moves are made to act on the issues raised following George Floyds murder within your workplace, between your friends and family - let alone highly damaging, negating responses<sup>18</sup> - the effect of considering, discussing, suggesting, being asked or just hearing, brings to the fore deep-rooted pain and struggle.

Pre pandemic, visits to museums and galleries were increasing: ‘museums and galleries are more visited than ever.’<sup>19</sup> with the Tate recently bumping the British Museum from the

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how to look after their mental wellbeing and recognise when classmates may be struggling, as the Government unveils new guidance for the introduction of compulsory health education...

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/all-pupils-will-be-taught-about-mental-and-physical-wellbeing>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/your-rights-under-equality-act-2010>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/publications/covid-19-and-nations-mental-health-october-2020>

<sup>18</sup> For one recent example, see the Sewell Report:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/974507/20210331\\_-\\_CRED\\_Report\\_-\\_FINAL\\_-\\_Web\\_Accessible.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/974507/20210331_-_CRED_Report_-_FINAL_-_Web_Accessible.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Museum and Gallery Studies: The Basics By Rhiannon Mason, Alistair Robinson, Emma Coffield

top of the visitor charts in 2020. If we explore this through a purely market-based frame, we can see clearly opportunities for repurposing these numbers. In a world driven by numbers, data and consumers' these visitor destinations are too valuable not to (again) be useful to Government.

NHS England's 2021/22 priorities<sup>20</sup> include a number of mentions and recognition of the need to 'manage the increasing demand on mental health care services' with a roll out of mental health hubs. The priorities also state an expectation that individual health and wellbeing plans should be agreed with staff at least once a year. It is difficult to have faith that this will come to pass when children with acute mental health issues are currently given 6 month waiting lists before CAMHS are even able to assess their case.

Care should be taken not to fall into the trap of seeing culture as a replacement for social services, a well-designed social security system, or targeted mental health support like counselling and medication where it is needed (Mcfarland et al, 2020 p78)

I recognise that mental health just forms one aspect of 'wellbeing'<sup>21</sup> however I think it's important to show where the growing and urgent public needs are that the museum's wellbeing programmes will be supporting. Again we see the potential of the responsibility that lies ahead for museums and galleries in taking part in this area of 'growth'.

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/B0468-nhs-operational-planning-and-contracting-guidance.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> *Measuring Wellbeing: A guide for practitioners*, by New Economics Foundation (2012) states 'Wellbeing can be understood as how people feel and how they function, both on a personal and a social level, and how they evaluate their lives as a whole.' Whilst the Oxford English Dictionary describes it as 'the state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy.'

'All institutions are questionable if not downright suspect while at the same time they are simultaneously expected to deliver.' (Sheikh, S p.144)

I want here to flag that the preceding discussions around the museum and gallery forays into wellbeing provision are in fact a little superfluous. They ostensibly consider the gallery and museum as at the heart, an adequate space to support others in times of diagnosed need. However, I present here the challenge that the gallery or museum as they exist currently are woefully inadequate. I believe that unless radical and lasting changes are made, these spaces will, whilst supporting one group, continue to actively damage other groups, those they are currently damaging now.

To set a foundation of understanding of the museums' problematic position, it is useful to look briefly at (relevant) elements of recent museum and gallery history and theory, exposing tensions of truth and interpretation that can't help but influence and guide our thinking, shape our experiences as visitors to these institutions.

We can begin with the idea of the museum as a sacred space, as a gift of the benevolent patriarchy when royal, religious and aristocratic collections were opened to some echelons of society. We are familiar with discussions around the patriarchal and patronising presentation that aimed to uphold and encourage specific bourgeois aesthetics and sensibilities (closed off to many others members of society) and the idea of the museum as tool of the state is well rehearsed.

The public museum emerged as one of the campaigns of the state to direct the population in activities which would without people being aware of it, transform the population into a useful resource for the state. (Hooper Greenhill, 1992 p.167)

Tony Bennett (2013) describes the striving of the first museums to distance themselves from their precursors, the cabinets of curiosities and the funfair and their desire to embed chronology, to move away from 'showy' works. Instead they aimed to prioritise the presentation of a whole and comprehensive story, creating value in a refined, more 'civilised' approach that appreciates the 'small and ugly' (p3.), again attempting to gain a powerful voice of authenticity or selected truth. We know full well that the small and ugly was more than likely stolen (or obtained with grave inequity), that it was not necessarily accompanied with a comprehensive story based in reality or free from bias or prejudice, and we know that all this systemic imbalance remains today.

Bennett uses Foucault's theories on disciplinary society to explore the evolution of the museum, its relation to its public, its embodiment of power to provide a space of understanding for the public as to where they sit within that power (see Richard Handler's review of Bennett 2013).

Thus, for Bennett, museums should be seen as one of many "new cultural technologies" the purpose of which was to make "extended populations governable" by transforming them into "a constantly surveyed, self-watching, self-regulating, and ... consistently orderly public". (Handler, 1998 p.71)

Hooper Greenhill, 1992, had also earlier positioned Foucault's theories within the museum; suggesting that the use of 'newly pleasurable' technologies of 'discipline and control' were deployed in order to provide a secure public space in which multiple, potentially conflicting points of view can be present at the same time. She describes the 'softening' and 'disguising of inequalities' within the museum space, again referring to the tensions of truth (as far as it can be presented) and interpretation. This effectively manipulates the museum visitor, removing an honesty and objectivity that they believe they are receiving and that

they deserve. Whether they would want to experience the upset that would be caused by de-softening or revealing inequalities is another matter. In times when we need more than ever to address societal problems head on, there is no longer room for disguises.

Most contested is the question of change in the museum. Are museums changing or are they merely voicing the rhetoric of change? Are museums capable of change? Are they stuck in time, limited by elitist roots? Or have they always been in the process of change? (Marstine 2006 p.6)

The question of whether the museum is capable of change can be considered using the work of Marina Vishmidt. In *Beneath the Atelier*, Vishmidt describes the 'resonant paradox' of institutional critique, whereby the institutions osmotic relation to criticism 'amplifies rather than undermines' it, removing any power of the critic and repurposing the critique as asset. This applies to both individual and group / organisational critique. For there is a sense of being trapped within the arts, whereby we adhere to the gatekeepers, whilst trying to keep our dignity, though knowing that we serve to maintain the 'existing state of affairs'. (Vishmidt, 2008 p.253)

Critique, long since incorporated as an art theoretical asset, is now hegemonic, the sine qua non for discursive legitimacy in the circuits of art production and mediation. (Ibid, p253)

I would suggest that a case in point here might be found in the work of 'Shades of Noir'. An incredibly valuable organisation set up in 2009 by Aisha Richards, to address the subject of racism in the arts, based at University of the Arts London (UAL). In October 2020, UAL announced that **Shades of Noir** is to become its Centre for Race and Practice Based Social Justice<sup>22</sup>. Something within this doesn't sit right when UAL staff members of African heritage are (still) being made to feel that they have no choice but to resign (May 2021) due to the treatment they receive. Though I again flag here that this does not lie at the feet of the organisation but that SoN is victim to the wider asset accumulation Vishmidt refers to. It

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<sup>22</sup> <https://www.arts.ac.uk/about-ual/press-office/stories/ual-announces-shades-of-noir-is-to-become-its-centre-for-race-and-practice-based-social-justice>

can be seen also in the defence of the Barbican post the murder of George Floyd, whereby they held up their relationship with iniva as evidence of their commitment to anti -racism. I am deeply sceptical as to whether there will be any real change post the publication of Barbican Stories.

In *Beneath the Atelier*, Vishmidt points to the work of Andrea Fraser alongside organisations<sup>23</sup> to explore ideas around an expanded institution, leading to a consideration of the more encompassing term of 'infrastructure', wherein the institution might no longer be able to benefit from its critique or hide.

It was unsurprising to hear in discussion with Renee Odjidja that there had been a lack of emotional support built in to her role - a role which much like most frontline education roles, is akin to that of key worker, and as such should have access to regular supervision.<sup>24</sup> This, in combination of the lack of expectation around how her place at the gallery or rather the galleries place in the anti-racist movement could be better understood or supported in the wake of BLM forms a weight that will gradually increase. It vital that this weight is shared.

The effects of working in arts institutions on staff and the gaping holes of internal provision and support are made painfully clear in Jemma Desai's 'This work is not for us', discussed most profoundly with Jamila Prowse in her Lighthouse podcast series. This, read alongside Teresa Cisneros' Document 0 clearly lays out much of how destructive the current systems are. We have not been starved of this information after so many revelations, made privately

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<sup>23</sup> The Women's Liberation Art Group, the Art Workers' Coalition, or the American Indian Movement—artists Adrian Piper, Jimmie Durham, David Hammons, the Guerrilla Girls, VALIE EXPORT, William Pope.L. (Vishmidt 2017 p.2)

<sup>24</sup> Though it should be noted Renee reported that the Whitechapel had offered counselling for their staff over the last year which was reassuring to hear.

or publicly to each of us in the arts, over the last year (of course you had to be actively listening to really hear what these mean).

In some organisations, where a focus on care for the artists has been claimed, I have experienced there to have been a dearth of care for the staff. In some cases, the internal staff support / mechanisms of care offered are wrapped up in a conceptual and theoretical discourse which does nothing to support the lived experience of the impacts of mental health, particularly over the pandemic / BLM protests.

Within the works of a number of current artists, writers and thinkers, particularly within the Black and brown communities there have been attempts to centre the connection of working in the arts and (genuine, active) care. The Serpentine Gallery's recent launch of a new fellowship conceived in partnership with Sumayya Vally,<sup>25</sup> speaks to this notion, so to, does the work of Jade Montserrat. Jade's openness around her work addresses and exposes in the most vulnerable ways, the complexities of race and identity within the institution and the UK. This work had to be a precursor to finding ways in which care can be centred, worked with, embodied within the gallery, within the reciprocal to and fro of conversation and compromise between artist, curator, producer, director and audience.

This hasn't been and won't be an easy process. There are a myriad ways of understanding care – care that is enacted between those who hear and see you, care between those that don't. And this move to define and enact appropriate care is only just starting to be explored in earnest, between those who know and understand. Directors and leaders who hold sectional and intersectional lived experiences of difference, are in positions that enable a sensitivity and nuanced level of understanding that is crucial in determining and deciphering care in collaboration with the artists, audiences and staff they support. But again, this isn't

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<sup>25</sup> <https://www.serpentinegalleries.org/whats-on/support-structures-for-support-structures/>

without risk and completely depends on how those leaders think and act. As referenced in Document 0, in 'It's a Feedback Loop', Cisneros discusses that there are no simple solutions.

Placing a POC Director in a majority white institution might not enable any sort of change: 'Some of these people replicate the colonial mindset so no change and the same pandering to the same patron.' (Cisneros, 2018 p. 40)

This problem calls for a more in depth and crucially considerate exploration, not covered in this essay, to look at why and how this occurs that I only touch on here: one that really is a feedback loop, shaped and perpetuated by colonialism, racism and struggles to survive and the importance of leaving space for people's character and active choices.

What has been clear over the last year and (including in the development of Jade Montserrat's consideration of care, linked to the Future Collect project at iniva & Manchester Art Gallery) has been the building of networks of support that sit outside of organisations. I am sceptical of those networks that are situated within any programme-based organisation as the risks of asset building outlined above remain too great within such a competitive funding market.

That being said, removing ourselves from within organisations comes at a cost and throws up questions of how to really do things differently in order to make real change. The work of Daniel Regan<sup>26</sup>, who wears a number of hats within the field of arts and health is of relevance here. Whilst Regan is an artist and exhibits in galleries, he is also art director of the Free Space Project and Executive Director of the Arts and Health Hub which he founded to support artists working in arts and health. The Free Space Project is a model of

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<sup>26</sup> <https://www.danielregan.photography>



social prescribing that really works. Described as a 'beautiful space' the project is embedded in NHS primary care.

Not here to fore addressed within this essay are the tensions I feel with the making and valuing of artworks within the current institution and the opportunities there might be to explore new models, through the influence of the wellbeing programmes. Regan suggests his artistic practice is his work, inseparable from his other roles of (what I understand as) collaborating, supporting, fostering, facilitating others. Yet how does this sit alongside the market driven ideas of what it is to be an artist when even social practices that might rely on participation can be co-opted to fall into the same trap as critique (again see Vishmidt, 2017).

Responding to questions of practice and how we might affect real change, Regan agreed that we need to be moving towards a different understanding of success within the arts, that we are living with outdated models that limit, distract, deprive artists, audiences (and I would add organisational staff) of agency. It is hard to imagine being able to carve out a space within the current arts system whereby success would not be measured in sales of work but in the structured support and progression of those you are working with. In addition, what could that look like?

## **Conclusion**

Who makes up "the public" and how does the institution work to create equitable sets of relationships between those varied members? If there has been a long history of disadvantage, disregard or even neglect by cultural institutions for certain members of the public, how does an institution attempt to be "with the public" as well as for the public?

(Dr Karen Salt, 2018, Document 0)

My aim within this essay was to consider whether museums and galleries are in a fit state to further embed, and name programmes of wellbeing. I attempted to look at existing political and social tensions within the museum and think about how these might affect both existing and new audiences who access these wellbeing programmes and discussed the effect of new institutionalism on critique that might lead to change.

I agree with Simon Sheikh (2006), in regard to his suggestion to ‘unhinge stable categories and subject positions’ within the fragmented public sphere but potentially to consider the public sphere outside of the art institution and accept (as Critical Race Theory supports) that the unhinging should be done within the infrastructure.

Here, through the construct of infrastructural critique we might be able to rest ideas of emancipatory art and learning, (that are consistently developed by rocking the boat, poking the hornets’ nest or merely speaking back, creating Mouffe’s ‘agonistic’ space<sup>27</sup> with ideas of enabling still or stable minds.

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<sup>27</sup> In Mouffe, C. 2002. For an agonistic public sphere, she writes: ‘According to such a view, the aim of democratic institutions is not to establish a rational consensus in the public sphere but to defuse the potential hostility that exists in human societies by providing possibility for antagonism to be transformed into agonism’

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