

Artists' Brief

We Are Commoners!

A Craftspace national touring exhibition

Introduction

We Are Commoners will be a national touring exhibition curated by Craftspace.

The exhibition will launch at Midlands Arts Centre (MAC) in September 2020 and tour throughout the UK to up to seven further galleries and museums. We are looking to commission artists for the exhibition and/or its events programme.

The exhibition will feature work by 14 artists including 2 based internationally, which will be a mix of new commissions and loaned pieces. Having completed an expression of interest callout in autumn 2018 to map current practice, we have a shortlist of artists and are currently oversubscribed with textiles but continue to seek work in other applied arts disciplines.

In addition to MAC confirmed tour venues include Oriel Davies Gallery in Newtown Wales, the Devon Guild of Craftsmen and The Civic in Barnsley. We will be working with the venues to develop an events programme which will also provide opportunities for participating artists.

Background

"The commons means: Things we share/ Places we share/ Systems we share/ Ideas we share/ Culture we share" *Peter Barnes, On the Commons co-founder*

We Are Commoners will be an exhibition on the theme of the commons through the lens of craft and making. We are fundraising for a Festival of Commoning comprising a series of events, activities, workshops and performances. It is anticipated that elements of the festival will accompany the touring exhibition.

For further reading on The Commons please visit: craftspace.co.uk/commoners/

The exhibition seeks to:

- ☐ Explore craft as a form of commons (knowledge, materials, practice, heritage).
- ☐ Highlight the acts of 'commoning' that are shaping community futures and the world they want to live in.
- ☐ Ask what ideas of community and sense of collectivity can and are reclaim/ing the commons.
- ☐ Produce thought provoking, engaging and interactive content (physical and digital) that inspires audiences and citizens.
- ☐ Reflect on the re-emergence of social charters and identify who are today's commoners and what are their aspirations.

Exhibited works will include:

- ☐ Three artworks made in response to or co-created with communities in three site specific and socially engaged residencies.
- ☐ Commissioned work informed by/in response to commons themes and issues with some input from commons activists or academic researchers.
- ☐ Loan of pre-selected existing artworks which already relate to commons thinking.

Residencies

Residency locations/sites:

Each residency will be hyper-local and make its own distinctive response to commons thinking and practice and the ideas posited in the exhibition. Drawing on local contexts; heritage, history, community, activists, land, space/s, politics etc.

Birmingham - Balsall Heath

A partnership between Craftspace, Midlands Arts Centre and St. Paul's Community Development Trust www.stpaulstrust.org.uk. Their mission is "To support individuals and families in Balsall Heath and wider Birmingham to lead healthy and fulfilled lives and make a positive contribution to their neighbourhood and the city". They run schools, a community centre, a city farm and recreational land. Two initiatives that a residency could link into are their plans to take over a council owned pocket park through community asset transfer and the creation of a library of things. Balsall Heath is an ethnically and socially diverse residential suburb of Birmingham. It has a high number of post war and newly arrived migrant communities from South Asia and more recently the Horn of Africa. The housing is a mixture of privately owned and housing association property. English is a second language for the majority of the local population.

St. Helens, Merseyside

Hosted by collaborative and social arts agency Heart of Glass www.heartofglass.org.uk . St. Helen's developed rapidly in the Industrial Revolution of the 18th & 19th centuries into a significant centre for coal mining and glassmaking. It was also home to a cotton and linen industry, (notably sail making that lasted until the mid-19th century as well as salt, lime and alkali pits, copper smelting, and brewing.) Glass producer Pilkington is the towns' only remaining large industrial employer. Previously it was home to Beechams, the Gamble Alkali Works, Ravenhead Glass, United Glass Bottles, Triplex, Darglish Foundry and Greenall's brewery. 98.84% of the St. Helens population described itself as White British in 2001. The largest ethnic minority in St Helens in 2001 was recorded as Indian with 409. By 2006, the otherwise transient traveller community have overtaken that number and are now considered to "make up the largest identifiable ethnic minority group in St Helens". Heart of Glass have identified the district of Parr as a focus for the residency, working with a young women's group.

Newtown, Wales (tbc fundraising permitting)

Hosted by Oriel Davies Gallery www.oriel Davies.org. Newtown is known as the birthplace of Robert Owen social reformer and a founder of Utopian socialism and the Co-operative Movement. The gallery is involved as a partner in Open Newtown, a new initiative connecting and enhancing the town's green spaces. The intention is to "involve the people of Newtown in helping them make choices that will really benefit the town centre, townspeople and ensure a promising future for Newtown."

Crafting the Commons Research Network

in partnership with Nottingham Trent University – funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council

The network will bring together exhibiting artists, curators with craft/design or Commons researchers and/or academics to participate in a series of four workshops/events. The network aims to cross-fertilise craft/design and commons scholarship and influence future practical activity to creatively interrogate intersections between 'disruptive' craft practices and concept of commons. The network will generate theoretical and practical insight into the application of commons ideas and narratives in a craft context. Small groups of network members will undertake targeted research activities between the events.

Exhibiting artists based in the UK will participate in two network events and the three residency artists will participate in three as follows:

- ☐ 11-12 December 2019: will introduce key concepts of the commons and make initial connections to disruptive craft practices.
- ☐ Late April/early June (tbc) 2020 (residency artists only): use project experiences and stories from the first event to generate/prototype ideas for 'craft commons' via a social design jam.
- ☐ October 2020 (tbc), 2 days: Day 1 - structured discussion to critically reflect on the research network programme. Discuss future format and activities. Day 2 – sharing day to communicate the network's activity to the public, to coincide with the exhibition launch in Birmingham.

Three research questions will be investigated by the network:

- ☐ What forms of commons can be created or animated through craft, making and repair?
- ☐ What are the political dimensions of these practices, and what is their transformative potential?
- ☐ What mythologies and narratives are drawn on in the creation of these 'craft commons', and how are these translated into social and material practice?

In addition to the network events:

- ☐ Pairs of academics will visit the three residency projects.
- ☐ Skype meetings will connect academics with the other artists selected for the exhibition.
- ☐ In both cases the academics will act as both a resource and observer.

Fees and Diary

Residency fee

Birmingham residency fee: £6,500 (inclusive of VAT), it is anticipated the other two residencies will offer a similar fee.

This fee includes:

- ☐ Site visit
- ☐ Planning and preparation
- ☐ Residency contact time
- ☐ Research network workshops
- ☐ Studio time/commission fee. Approximately 22 days plus studio time.

There is further budget for each residency e.g. for travel, accommodation and materials.

Exhibitor fee

Exhibitor commission fees will vary between £800 - £2000 depending on proposals. There is further budget for contact with activists and network meetings.

Requirements

All work should be durable and suitable to withstand a 12-18 month tour.

Draft Timescale

- ☐ 9am (UK time) Monday 21 October 2019: **Deadline for applications**
- ☐ November 2019: Exhibitor selection and contracting
- ☐ 11 & 12 December 2019: first AHRC Network event with commissioned artists
- ☐ January – March 2020 residency planning
- ☐ January – July 2020: Exhibition and commission production
- ☐ Spring 2020: Residency projects delivery
- ☐ April- June 2020: second AHRC Network event (residency artists only)
- ☐ July – August 2020: exhibit photography and exhibition design production
- ☐ September 2020: exhibition launch (date TBC), final AHRC Network events (2 days)
- ☐ 26 September – 22 November 2020 exhibition at MAC