



Notes from MACHINE: What's cooking? # 1 public program
Contemporary Art Tasmania | 5.30PM, 23 September 2021

What's cooking? #1 was designed to provide a context for discussing topics important to artists now, foster connection and an occasion for artists to **speculate on what could be of value to progress their practice**. Four established and mid-career Tasmanian artists participated in the program with the conversation opened up through audience discussion. From this process of enquiry CAT will develop the collective learning program, MACHINE.

PROGRAM: Welcome - Kylie Johnson; Introduction - Bill Hart; Presentation - Amanda Davies; Presentation - Mike Singe; Presentation - Loren Kronemyer; Presentation - Joshua Santospirito; Open discussion. Notetaker, Hannah Foley.

Amanda Davies introduced her self-reflexive painting practice and work in development, focussing on ideas of unease, the body and illness.

What is needed

- Consideration was given to how organizations could provide increased support to artists developing large-scale works over long periods of time. Davies recognised that the creative process can be hindered by the added expectations placed on artists, beyond the making process. Artspace could encourage ambitious projects by increasing support to artists across: art administration (grant writing); networking support; and, teams dedicated to install and production assistance.
- Organisations could further support artists by facilitating skill development programs in arts administration, masterclasses in skill development and assisted residencies.
- Continuing to speculate on residencies, Davies suggested that programs with no expected outcomes may also provide artists with space to 'rest, filter and create'. Opportunities to travel, 'soak up' experiences and to provide space for reflection are valuable to the artistic process, regardless of the quantity of work made.

Mike Singe's practice is informed by the evolving culture and language that has developed in response to the looming environmental disaster. His most recent works span drawing and sculpture.

What is needed

- Singe speculated that beyond financial assistance, the key thing that organisations could assist artists with is time to concentrate on their practice. Artists can usually only dedicate a certain percentage of each week to their art practice, due to other life commitments. Anything that assists in maximising the time available for creative production is helpful.
- Artists have multifaceted practices, operating as both maker and producer. Organisations could support artists by: offering programs to develop practical art-making skills (while conceptual development is important, it currently dominates creative discourse); facilitate networking opportunities by connecting practitioners and service providers; and, reconsider the distribution of limited resources with fewer, and more targeted opportunities for intensive development, rather than micro-development programming.

- Singe suggested that artists and organisations must be brutally honest and clear about the true value that programs are providing. Artists should not apply for things that do not suit their practice. Organisations should consider what the ongoing, tangible value of development programs will be for the specific artists participating. How is it going to help artists, and which artists will it help?

Loren Kronemyer works span objects, interactive and live performance, experimental media art, and large-scale world-building projects aimed at exploring ecological futures and survival skills.

What is needed

- Kronemyer considered the challenge of how artists move forward with large-scale projects in the ongoing Covid landscape, describing her own situation of having multiple projects postponed and the difficulties in trying to stay motivated through Covid-related setbacks.
- Artists would benefit from support with administration. This is important work, but the performance of this should be assisted. There is excitement and support for the final delivery of a project, but not for the administration that allows it to occur. She reasoned that organisations should assist artists to make art, not admin. The role of the artist has become increasingly administration heavy. Less meetings and more emails. Meetings are an uncompensated burden on artists, often with artists the only unpaid people in the room. Meetings take up valuable time and energy that could be better directed toward art.
- Kronemyer described Artist-first Contracting Terms which would allow artists to outline their non-negotiables, including their values (cultural safety values), artist care requirements and logistics (payments in case of cancellation) with all contracts aligning with best practice principles.
- Organisations should be striving to move toward a model that includes an artist wage.
- Trust in the artist is fundamental to building strong artist and organisational relationships - freedom for artists not to be pitching their project every week.

Joshua Santospirito practice includes painting, comics, performance, music, sound and writing and is primarily focused on identity and modern Australia.

What is needed

- Santospirito suggested that comic and graphic novel artists have a lot to offer the contemporary art world and would benefit from more inclusion in contemporary art programs and integration into the broader arts community. In constructing artist development programs organisations could think about how to engage artists who work at the peripheries of contemporary art and work towards fostering new connections between practitioners.
- He spoke about the Comic Art Workshop and his position as director. The Comic Art Workshop is an international group of comic artists, formed to meet a need for critical engagement, feedback and support between artists working in the comic field. The group engages in regular residencies and group workshops and is a reference point for useful development programming.
- Facilitating cross-discipline feedback and critique groups could benefit comic and graphic novel artist. Even simply providing space for these events to occur as artist led occasions would be valuable.

FROM THE DISCUSSION:

The group (presenters and audience) started the discussion by querying if the desire for **more time** was about paid artist time, or if it was about the time administration takes? Are there other mechanisms for organisations to make the artist's time more manageable? There was an acknowledgement that artists are often burdened by increased levels of **administration** around presenting their work in a gallery context. The time an artist spends on administration takes them out of the studio. Is there a way to shift that balance? Administration is part of the professional context but it is labour that is rarely valued or supported with care.

There was conversation on the economy of consuming art. **No more free art.** Would more ticketed occasions or pay per view systems be of benefit to the artist or not? Some consideration was given to the ethics of a Paywall for art system within an artspace context. Audiences often engage with work differently, perhaps in more intense ways if they are required

to pay for the experience. There was concern that a pay per view system would adversely impact some audiences and limit who has access to the work. The implementation of a living wage across society was suggested as a broader way of thinking around the issue.

An artist-first contract model would shift the power more equitably towards the artist. Not all organisations clearly state all of the artists responsibilities in contracts. It is important to recognise that there should be no oppositional dynamic between artist and organisation. They are allies. Sessions such as MACHINE: What's Cooking are important in 'doing the work' to grow this trust.

Would work in progress exhibitions and talks be useful? There was an acknowledgement that public progress presentations aren't always helpful. They can provide emotional nourishment during long-term projects but it is often better for this to occur in a **small group context** or in the studio rather than being a public presentation. A group of artists who are heavily invested in each other's work and prepared to rigorously and generously contribute to each other's practice would be the best scenario. Organisation led artist talks are usually formal and provide a 'quick and easy dose' of what the work is, but time and commitment is required for greater engagement. Organisations could do more to support artist groups by fostering solidarity between artists from different areas of practice. It was recognised that it takes time to build trust within groups, but once trust is there, these are valuable spaces for artists. The Comic Art Workshop could act as a model for an ongoing **artist workshop program** and critical feedback sessions as it allows for relationships and investment within each other's work to build over time, in a way that stand-alone artist talks and exhibitions mostly don't. It is also important to facilitate the 'collegial stuff', recognising the value in what happens between artists in a social setting (cafes, studios). In the age of Covid, do we still have the space for this type of engagement? There was consideration of how different **residency models** can hot-house collegial relationships. Artists gathering for an intensive, collaborative workshop or lab over a few days can also build relationships, trust and investment in the work. Would this type of lab residency be beneficial for emerging artists, who don't necessarily have the same confidence to share their work/ideas? **Artist labs** can be a single day event, or last weeks, with multiple artists thinking collaboratively toward a shared project. Labs can also take the form 'field trips' for artists (from multiple disciplines) and can include people working in areas other than art. The organisation's role in this type of program is to 'keep the artists alive'. The artists are free to participate and collaborate in whichever way they choose, and generate whatever they wish. There is value to **informal gatherings**, and also to formal, structured workshops. Could CAT work in the space between, taking on the role of bringing people together, as a quiet facilitator? Opportunities for artists to have conversation around their work diminishes throughout their career. Recent art school graduates, artist groups and communities have momentum, but this often dissolves with time. Shared studios can be beneficial, but do not suit everyone. Facilitated group sharing and workshopping could fill this gap for mid-career artists, creating space for such conversations to occur.



Further information:

Kylie Johnson

kylie@contemporaryart.org.au

www.contemporaryarttasmania.com