

NPA Roundtable

March 2021

art : architecture : office
inspiring creativity in the redefined workplace

Together with Assemble and BC, newplatform.art hosted a roundtable about reinventing the post-Covid workplace by designing for creativity within it.

The session was moderated by Fabienne Nicholas and brought together architects, artists and important players in the corporate world.

The pandemic has radically altered where and how people work. This will change again when it is deemed safe to return to the workplace. That moment provides an opportunity to redefine how working spaces are used.



ARCHITECTS & STUDIOS
MATERIALS

ASSEMBLE

Participants



Fabienne Nicholas, Contemporary Art Society

Fabienne has over 20 years' experience in the cultural and visual arts sectors. As Head of Art Consultancy for the Contemporary Art Society in London, she manages a portfolio of cultural strategies, major public art commissions and curatorial initiatives. She advises local authorities, property developers, universities and public sector and corporate clients. From the first statue of a woman in Parliament Square to developing long-term public art programmes for Cambridge and Bristol Universities, Fabienne has a passion for bringing great art to great places. In 2017 Fabienne was selected by the Mayor of London Sadiq Khan to become one of 50 Mayor's Design Advocates, advising the GLA's various agencies to ensure that London's growth is socially and economically inclusive, as well as environmentally sustainable.



Whitney Hintz, Hiscox

Whitney Hintz is an independent advisor and Curator of the Hiscox Collection. The Hiscox Collection comprises approximately 1000 works on display across the company's 37 offices in the UK, Europe and USA. In addition to overseeing the Hiscox Collection and advising private collections, Whitney is a board member of the Crossrail Arts Programme and Sculpture in the City, an annual outdoor public sculpture exhibition located within the City's Square Mile. She is also a consultant for the Kenneth Armitage Foundation and on the board of Platform Earth, an environmental initiative bringing together artists and scientists to produce outdoor public works. Whitney previously worked at Frith Street Gallery and formerly held positions in Development at the Whitechapel Gallery and Outset Contemporary Art Fund. She is a graduate of History of Art from Columbia University.



Liz Middleton, Sculptor

Liz Middleton is a sculptor and site-specific artist based in London. She trained in Fine Art and Historical Stone and Letter Carving. Following her BA she was awarded a two-year artist-in-residence studio from the Hampshire Sculpture Trust. In 2020 she was shortlisted for The Ingram Collection's emerging artist prize and showed at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition. At the beginning of 2020 she installed an ambitious site-specific sculpture for the King's High School for Girls in Warwick and is currently working with a community in Ebbsfleet on an aspirational creative Identity public art project. Liz was also a member of Heatherwick Studio for 14 years as their Head of Operations, and lead the production of their book 'Making' and seminal exhibition at the V&A Museum in 2012.



Joe Halligan, Assemble

Joseph Halligan is a founding member of Assemble, a multi-disciplinary collective, which formed in 2010. Focusing on work in the arts, Joe has designed and delivered a number projects including much of the collective's work in Liverpool, for which they were awarded the Turner Prize in 2015. Joe has lectured and taught internationally at a variety of universities including Yale, Cambridge and the ETH in Zurich. Joseph is currently visiting professor at the EPFL in Lausanne. Joe has recently completed the design and delivery of a new permanent gallery at the Wellcome Collection in London and is currently working with the Luma foundation in Arles on a new workspace for the experimental think tank, production workshop and learning network, Atelier Luma.



Heather Melville, PwC

Dr. Heather Melville, OBE is a thought leader on leadership, an innovator in business and has a notable track record of delivering strong financial performance and building high performing inclusive teams across both financial and professional services.

Heather also holds a number of Trustee positions: Chair of Chartered Management Institute Women, Board Trustee CMI and Enfield Enterprise, Patron of Women in Banking and Finance and, most recently, a member of the PwC Colour Brave Charity Committee.



Nicolette Cavaleros, Outset

Nicolette is Co-Director and Trustee of Outset Contemporary Art Fund, an international, independent charity that pools donations from partners and patron circles to support contemporary art, challenge thinking and further the artistic discourse to inspire new audiences. She also leads Outset's Studiomakers campaign, that brokers truly affordable spaces for creative production and cultural consumption. Nicolette was an Associate Partner with strategy consulting firm Monitor Group where she worked with global corporates and governments to resolve strategic stakeholder issues and create development strategies at the intersection of private and public industry.

Adriano Picinati di Torcello

Adriano Picinati di Torcello coordinates art and finance activities for a large consulting firm

Participants



Laurens Bekemans, BC

Laurens Bekemans is an architect and co-founder of Brussels-based BC architects & studies—an architectural practice and non-profit research entity and materials laboratory—and most recently, BC materials—an urban mining company that repurposes construction site waste into construction materials. He is the co-author, with Pauline Lefebvre, of *The Act of Building*, and teaches at KULeuven University and UHasselt among others.



Stacie McCormick, Unit 1 Gallery

Stacie McCormick is the founder and creative mastermind behind Unit 1 Gallery | Workshop, a social enterprise supporting a diverse range of emerging and mid-career contemporary artists by providing them with space and time to develop their practice. The initiative currently supports 25 artists per year through residency programmes and exhibitions. Behind the busy scenes, and whilst continually creating new opportunities for artists, Stacie McCormick is creating mesmerising paintings in her studio, maintaining an active artistic practice. Multi-disciplinary, Los Angeles-born and London-based, Stacie McCormick is painting primarily on canvas and paper, producing works that are abstract and gestural.



Bobby Read, Hiscox

Bobby is currently Head of Arts and Private Clients and has been involved with that sector since he joined Hiscox in 1992. He also currently underwrites the Specie account and has during his time at Hiscox has also underwritten the financial institutions, surety bond reinsurance and warranty and indemnity books.

Prior to joining Hiscox Bobby was a fine art insurance broker and management consultant.



Paul Newdick, Newplatform.art

Paul was a partner at International law firm Clyde & Co LLP for over 25 years, where he was a litigator, employment specialist and an accredited mediator. He was Chair of Clyde & Community, the firm's CSR programme. Paul was a founding trustee and served as Chair of LawWorks (the Solicitors Pro Bono Group) for 15 years, a trustee of the Bar Pro Bono Unit, the National Pro Bono Centre and LawWorks (Scotland). He was awarded a CBE in 2008 and made an honorary QC in 2014. With a lifelong interest in the visual arts, Paul designed and launched the Clyde & Co Art Awards in 2010. Since leaving the law in 2017, Paul has focussed on supporting early career artists, as a founding trustee of newplatform.art.



Jacqueline Poncelet, Artist

Born in Liege, Belgium, Jacqueline Poncelet studied ceramics at Wolverhampton College of Art and the Royal College of Art from 1966 until 1972. From the mid 80s she extended her practice to include painting, sculpture, installation and public art commissions. A British Council Arts Fellowship in 1978 enabled her to travel extensively in the USA and she has since taught and lectured worldwide. In 2000 she curated the British Art Show and in 2004 was a board member for the Artes Mundi exhibition (National Museum of Wales). She is represented in public collections throughout the world. In 2012 she completed a commission for Art on the Underground at Edgware road tube station. In 2020 a survey show at the New Art Centre, Roche Court showed the range of work she has produced since the mid 1980's.



Mark Dunhill, Newplatform.art

Following his MA in Sculpture from the RCA in 1977, Mark exhibited in private and public galleries. Working in collaboration with Tamiko O'Brien since 1998, Dunhill and O'Brien have exhibited widely and participated in residencies in Italy, Netherlands, Germany and Japan. They exhibited as part of the British Ceramics Biennial in Stoke on Trent in September 2019. Between 2008 and 2017 Mark was Dean of Academic Programmes at Central Saint Martins, and prior to this was Head of the School of Fine Art at University of the West of England in Bristol. He is Visiting Professor at Estonia Academy of Art. Mark is involved with many arts organisations and institutions including: Artquest, newplatform.art; Kenneth Armitage Foundation, Lasalle College of Arts, Singapore and Tallinn University, Estonia.

Initial Comments

LM

People will be using office space less, needing less space, and coming up with more creative ways to use space. Corporate work spaces can be daunting places for artists and we need to change this.

WH

It will be interesting to see how the urban centres change in response to the pandemic, and how people will balance going into work and working from home. As well as empty offices, the decline of the high street creates exciting opportunities for artists to have access to these spaces.

JH

Messy production work happening in cities brings different types of people together, creating new perspectives. The changing of office spaces opens up cities, creating more public spaces, leading to a special moment for collaboration.

HM

In looking at opening office spaces post-pandemic, we need to create a sense of safety and distance, but also creativity and innovation. The space needs to look good, feel good, and be inclusive, representing the communities we serve.

NC

Boundaries of the personal and professional have been greatly challenged by the pandemic, which has led to a fundamental change in behaviour. Things will not return to how they were, we could be seeing team work taking place in office spaces, but individual work at home. What is the opportunity for artist studios as office space becomes more

available? We need to engage more directly with developers to create viable long-term models of owning or leasing assets for artistic benefit.

AT

Understanding how employees want to work in the future could lead to more space in offices, particularly for new generations. While there is a need for more artwork and creativity in office spaces, there is also an educational need about the qualitative and quantitative benefits for companies. Cost is always an issue. We need to look at new technologies, what role could the distribution of art play in smart cities? Policy makers need to focus on quality of life and see the benefit of culture in cities.

LB

There is already a shift in the creative approach of how some workspaces are set up, like hybrid offices with different disciplines of workers in the same space. These are inspiring environments. The pandemic will bring accelerated changes that were already happening, such as smart cities. We need to be bold in decision making, and take action now.

BR

Office space is greatly reduced, and the space itself will change from being a place of work to a place of meeting. There is a real need to renew social capital with employees and business partners, which has been eroded over the last year. The logistics of changing these spaces is a real challenge.

JP

Buildings in themselves will change in light of the pandemic, and we need to avoid large dusty spaces remaining dead and empty. We need to recognise generational differences, stop thinking in compartments and start thinking about flexible spaces with movable walls, creating welcoming, vibrant spaces in cities. We can be more generous and create breathing space for those who work there.

SM

Artists are important mediators in society, without them, society will fall off a cliff. The most important thing to establish is space and time for artists to work. We need to establish residency programs, mentorships, and exhibitions, with the public invited into that experience to witness the making. We should all read *The Master and His Emissary* by Iain McGilchrist. Supporting artists will save our lives!

PN

Beyond supporting early career artists through the display of art, a professional development programme for artists is very important. We need to shift the thought process of early career artists to believe their art can sustain them financially, provided they have the basic building blocks of the business of being an artist. Conversations between established professional artists and early career artists are important to achieve this. Putting art in offices is one thing, but artists working in those spaces can

MD

open up a much-needed dialogue between the commercial and creative worlds.

We need to be alert to what we mean by "artist". The corporate sector tends to have a fairly narrow view, which we will need to broaden. Collaboration, shown by the Assemble and BC models of working, are what we should be aiming for.

Discussion

Creative Capital

An emerging theme of the roundtable discussion was the idea of creative capital, whereby the presence of creativity and making transforms office spaces and sparks new ideas and opportunities. Joe Halligan outlined Assemble's experience of this in their Stratford workspace: the large space was shared between Assemble staff and local carpenters, leading to the creation of a wood workshop. They created a dynamic and affordable space without walls, transforming the way everyone worked as well as the output of the office. This provided unique opportunities and ideas to emerge, and has now developed into a creative group of visual artists, sculptors, and metal workers in a new public space in Bermondsey, called 'Made in Bermondsey'.

Laurens Bekemans also highlighted his experience working at BC in Brussels, which combines three different entities within the same workspace, BC architects, BC studios, and BC Materials. This hybridised and holistic approach to the workplace sees office workers, university students, and construction workers interacting in the same place. Seeing a variety of people working, with lots of different things happening in one space is an inspiring environment.

Sculpture in the City is another interesting example of creative capital. Large artworks are displayed in public spaces annually. It brought a new audience into the City, creating new demographics, diversity, and activity, while its education programme brought in schools, inspiring new generations and breaking down boundaries.

Spaces

With Covid came the loss of social encounters in the workspace and the necessary creative friction of cities, which is needed now more than ever. The Hiscox experience has been one of art on display stimulating the workplace, which will be a big part of its move to 22 Bishopsgate. Although enticing staff back to the office is one challenge, people have missed the art they are used to seeing in the office. This will be a big part of reinvesting in social capital, yet there are endless opportunities and empty spaces that could be used to generate creative capital.

There are some significant benefits to creating mixed use space, witnessing the production of art changes the dialogue between artist and audience. Facebook provided a very good example of bringing screen printers into their workspace. Art does not need to be just a part of the leisure economy, there is much to be said for doing/making/engaging with the public. While many will continue to work from home, there is a clear group of people - artists and makers - who cannot work from home and they desperately need these spaces and the opportunity to create site-responsive work.

Both Joe and Laurens noted that workshops often need to be on the ground floor of buildings. Unused office car parks could be ideal spaces for metal and wood workshops, as well as ground floor spaces in office buildings. Ground floor spaces are where people come together, there is a sense of circulation yet they are often separate from office areas where confidentiality is necessary.

It was also noted that the transforming of space is a conversation that needs to include developers, are they are also recognising the role of arts and culture in making thriving places of work. This is the threshold of private/public space and there could be more sharing, to make going to work an exciting destination.

For the corporate occupiers of these buildings, the disruption to large uniform spaces is a challenge, with issues of safety, security and confidentiality of information to be thought through and overcome. However, production does not always have to be messy or noisy.

Discussion

Value Proposition

How do we show the inherent value of working with creatives in the mixed workplace? Finding the right argument to generate positive decision making at the corporate board level will be a vital element in creating new spaces for artists and makers.

Several agendas play into corporate thinking: the relationship between creativity and innovation, cultural relevance, wellbeing and mental health. Environment, Social, Governance (ESG) agendas are moving from Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) agendas. Relationships with local communities, diversity and inclusion, and sustainability are all aspects which artists working in commercial spaces can speak to. All these are benchmarks into which we can articulate the value of creativity in the workplace.

We need to be mindful of competing with other traditional benefits with immediate impact, like canteens and gyms. What are the immediate and long-term benefits of having culture in public and private space? Creativity needs to come with people doing, making and engaging in things in a transformative way.

Communication and Education

Communication between the corporate world and the art world is vital in affecting change. Lack of communication leads to missed opportunities, and it is clear from the experiences of Assemble and BC that conversations and interactions create new opportunities and ideas.

From a corporate perspective, there is a sense of needing qualitative and quantitative data, understanding the costs, benefits and logistics of a long-term commitment. From an artistic perspective, there is a need for dialogue and inclusion within these spaces. For the best outcomes, artists need to be involved right at the beginning of discussions, decision making, and creative briefs. These are conversations that need mediators to bridge that gap; a new kind of curator or creative producer to facilitate conversations and contracts with commercial partners.

This change also needs to happen from the ground up, starting with education. The value of creative capital in the workplace needs to be articulated. There is a distinct lack of teaching and understanding about the visual arts and we can change this.

Education at board level is necessary to ensure this is a long-term investment, but we need to be clear about the benefits, but also the cost, in terms of time and money. There is a lack of materials really showing the benefit of corporate support for the arts, and these examples are essential in communicating the value proposition.

The conversation also needs to get to the point that people are actively demanding change. The pandemic has shown an increase in the desire to create and make on a domestic level, so there is a level of innate creativity that can be tapped into by having artist-led workshops in the workplace, alongside the witnessing of production. Once the culture changes, companies will have to change to suit the workforce.

Next Steps

This is a unique and exciting moment to bring real and lasting change into cities and the lives of those working and living in the city. There will be inertia and conventional attitudes to overcome. Larger corporates will be harder to convince, given their decision-making processes. Whilst both Assemble and BC present some shining examples of how multidisciplinary working benefits everyone involved, for traditional office set-ups this may, initially, be seen as a step too far.

Starting small, with a progressive commercial organisation, will enable us to show what works and a case study may be easier to convert others to follow, rather than trying to convince on a conceptual basis. The value proposition can be better articulated in describing real events. There will be benefit in newplatform.art reaching out to its alumni to see if there are existing examples of access to commercial spaces to make and display, as well as to known examples, such as Facebook, 180 The Strand and others elsewhere in Europe. A broader conversation is needed.

The discussion concluded that there is a need and a desire to bring culture and creativity into a post-pandemic workplace. This can be progressed from the ground up, encouraging those being asked to return to the workplace to demand change, as well as at board level. What is lacking at present are mediators/curators/creative producers to present these ideas and aid communication between the corporate world and the art world.

Once we have a case study, which will have more impact if it is accompanied by a commissioned film, and examples of similar practice, we can start to progress this theme. Everyone participating expressed an interest in continuing the discussion.

Contact



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