



# From Small Shifts to Profound Changes

CREATIVE  
AND PEOPLE  
PLACES

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Creative People and Places and  
its impact on artistic practice

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# Executive summary

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Portrait – people and places of the First Art area by David Severn and Kajal Nisha Patel. Commissioned by First Art. Photo: Ralph Barklam

## Creative People and Places

One of Arts Council England's goals is that everyone has the opportunity to experience and be inspired by the arts, museums, and libraries. Creative People and Places (CPP) is a national action research programme funded by Arts Council England that aims to support this ambition by providing investment in parts of the country where engagement with the arts is lower than the national average with the aim of increasing the likelihood of participation.

The vision for Creative People and Places is to support the public in shaping local arts and cultural provision and, in so doing, to increase attendance and participation in excellent art and culture. It aims to support new and different approaches to developing cultural programmes that genuinely engage people in shaping provision and involve a variety of partners and long term collaborations between local communities, arts organisations, museums, libraries, amateur groups, the voluntary sector and others.

The Arts Council observes that CPP is driven: 'by empowerment...the public as artists and as producers. Not just as participants in artistic projects, but also participants in decision making processes.'

The programme comprises a network of 21 independent projects across England. They each deliver a bespoke programme of work locally, and collectively represent the national voice of Creative People and Places Network. Reflection, evaluation and sharing learning are integral to the CPP Programme and this report is part of a series of reports, visuals, toolkits, case studies and think pieces, which can be found on the CPP website.

## Background to this research

The rationale for this thematic research originated from the CPP Network, where there is a strong commitment to creating the right conditions for artists to create exceptional work, as well as ensuring that the process of creating work is robust, within the context of socially engaged practice.

The CPP Network is aware of a range of approaches to working with artists across all of the 21 Places and commissioned this research in order to understand the wider impact that CPP is having on artistic practice and the cultural sector as a whole.

This research captures the perspectives of artists who have been commissioned to create new work with one or more CPP Places and of the CPP team members who are responsible for programming and working with artists and communities.

During June-August 2018 we interviewed individual members of 15 CPP teams and 11 artists who represent a range of art form practice and levels of experience. Through online surveys, we also captured quantitative data from 14 CPP Places and 18 local participants' perspectives on working with artists. Key findings were shared and discussed at a CPP Peer Learning event in September 2018.

## Which artists is Creative People and Places working with?

We asked CPP teams to tell us about which artists they have commissioned and why; about the artist's level of experience, location, protected characteristics and art-form specialisms. The 14 CPP Places who responded to the survey had commissioned 530 artists to make new work in the period January 2013 to July 2018.<sup>1</sup> 75% of the commissioned artists (400) were already experienced at working collaboratively in community contexts and 53% (282) had previously lived or worked in the CPP place they were commissioned by. CPP places have been commissioning artists fairly evenly across a wide range of art forms.

The quality of the artistic idea and the artist's level of ambition were cited as the key factors influencing commissioning panel decisions. Most CPP teams reflected that, in their experience, artists who are open and flexible are most likely to deliver successful commissions. This was especially linked to longer-term commissions where artists might have to change track with their approach or plans. The willingness of artists to exchange skills with participants as part of commissions was seen as a vital part of the legacy of projects by local people, CPP teams and artists themselves. CPP teams and participants place a high value on the artists' curiosity and interest in learning from the place and its people.

The complexities around commissioning local or non-local artists, and supporting the professional development of local artists were raised by all CPP teams we spoke to. They see investing in artists who live locally as a key component of the sustainability and legacy of their CPP projects. This is being addressed through a focus on workforce and talent development, as well as awarding commissions to local artists.

In our survey of local people who had been involved in commissioning artists and participating in their projects we asked 'What makes a

commission successful?' 72% gave most weight to 'the way the artist interacted with them and listened to them', 67% valued the fact that the artist's work 'responded thoughtfully to the location and the community' and 50% indicated that 'the artists' outside eye was useful for the project'. Only 27% gave most weight to "the artist was local and/or knew the people and the place well". The way in which artists work with local people was seen as more important than where the artist was from.

Being local doesn't necessarily mean that an artist is right for the commission. A requirement to be a local artist can be also be in tension with the aspiration to recruit an artist with diverse perspectives. Several interviewees described the advantages of bringing with them an 'outsider eye'.

Interviewees were asked about their approach to diversity and equity and how it affected the commissioning process and the artists' projects. Four of the eleven artists talked explicitly about how racism and divisions along ethnic and religious lines in communities affected the work they made, and about the impact of their own cultural backgrounds on the process. Most of the CPP teams interviewed were frank in their admission that diversity and equalities were given either not enough, or in some cases, any consideration when commissioning artists.

This question is relevant to the way CPP Places have been thinking about people, place and power. It is part of the question about who has the privilege of defining culture. To research the impact of CPPs on artist practice it was important to ask whether the leadership signalled<sup>2</sup> by commissioning artists who are from Black and Asian backgrounds and Deaf and disabled artists was being considered and if not, why it should be. CPP teams identified several strategies they could implement to address equity in commissioning artists and these are detailed in the report.

<sup>1</sup> These figures indicate unique artists' commissions rather than the number of individual artists employed. Some artists will have been commissioned more than once by a CPP and by more than one project. 'Artist' has been used to refer to either an individual practitioner or an arts company.

<sup>2</sup> Leadership not just in terms of leaders of organisations but also in terms of artists as leaders.

CPP Places can, and should be, part of wider action and activism to address the systemic inequalities in the arts and in society. Creative People and Places will represent £90 million of public investment by Arts Council England (including the new 2019 round), so they are an important and powerful part of the arts funding system, and one that is accountable to citizens.

CPP teams' commitment to supporting and commissioning more artists who live in or near to CPP places comes through loud and clear in this research. Also evident is CPP's strategic commitment to developing artists who are interested in socially engaged and participatory practice. However these commitments could be more clearly aligned with strategies for diversity, representation and equalities. This would have a significant impact on artistic practice. As an action research programme, CPP projects are able to take risks, encouraged to be innovative and are in essence challenging mainstream perceptions and definitions of what art is and who the artists are.

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### **Recommendation 1**

CPP Places increase the number of commissions from Black, Asian, Deaf and disabled artists and ensure their visibility as artist leaders across CPP Places. CPP Places should capture monitoring data for artists, as they do for participants, employees etc.

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### **Recommendation 2**

CPP works with Arts Council England to identify resources to deliver diverse artist workforce development as part of its wider strategy to develop new audiences.

## **How is Creative People and Places working with artists?**

We asked CPP teams to tell us about how they are working with artists - what are the core components and contexts to being commissioned by CPP. We also asked artists what they thought the key characteristics of working with CPPs were and if any of these were different compared with their experience of other organisations or agencies who are dedicated to the field of socially engaged/participatory arts.

Artists identified that a distinctive feature of being commissioned by CPP was working with local people at all stages, from the commissioning to the creation and presentation of the artistic work. This is not necessarily unique in the artists' experience but several commented on the priority CPP places give to community participation and in particular the use of community panels. This often charges the artist with a greater sense of responsibility to their CPP commissioners.

Some artists and CPP teams are aware that they need to pay more attention to clarifying the roles of 'commissioner' and 'artist', and the relationships and responsibilities of each when drawing up contracts. They talked about how this affects the quality of the hosting experience for both CPP teams and artists.

The lack of suitable and affordable workspaces to make and rehearse was a common challenge for over half the CPP Places participating in this research and for the artists working with them. We heard from many CPP teams about how public spaces are increasingly privatised and how their use then becomes subject to restrictions. However CPP teams are addressing the lack of suitable spaces for making artistic work in a range of pragmatic, imaginative and entrepreneurial ways.

Many examples were given of CPP teams working with local authorities and local businesses to access public spaces, retail units and

underused facilities. Libraries and museums are utilised widely by CPP, where they exist. Pubs, social clubs, sports venues, factories, shopping malls and supermarkets were all cited as venues for activity, bringing both opportunities and limitations. Reclaiming under-used buildings, claiming public spaces in town centres and high streets – the desire to influence regeneration and resist gentrification – these have been spurs for commissions that connect people across sectors - the arts, local government, voluntary, health, sport and business sectors.

Artists and CPP teams are responding critically and creatively to the challenges posed by conventional narratives around heritage. CPP teams, local participants and artists all talked powerfully about place, people and heritage and about how an explicit aim of many commissions has been to shift some frozen narratives about what heritage can mean and to tell new stories which offer new perspectives, opportunities and platforms.

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### Recommendation 3

CPP teams ensure that roles, responsibilities and resources are clearly outlined in artists' contracts and that realistic time-frames are allocated for relationship building.

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### Recommendation 4

CPP Places are more vocal about offering their guidance and expertise to local authorities to support authentic and refreshed visitor/tourism strategies that reflect and include local arts and creativity.

## How is Creative People and Places supporting artistic practice?

We asked the CPP teams and commissioned artists about what specific support was being offered to artists to help them develop their practice. A range of professional development and fundraising support

emerged as key findings, with the personal and social value of good hosting by CPP teams and communities also cited by most of the artists. This was described as making introductions, arranging work space, tours of the locality, social events and, for artists outside the area, accommodation.

Professional development for artists is valued by both CPP teams and the artists themselves. CPP teams are finding that developing artists is integral to their mission to attract new audiences and engage more people in creative activity. Talent development for local artists and local people is seen as important for sustainability, diversity and legacy reasons. In addition, professional development for artists at all levels of experience, some of whom are new to participatory practice, is seen as important to nurture, grow and diversify the artists working in this particular sector.

A national strategy for developing socially engaged artistic practice involving partnerships with arts, academia and health sectors could support this work effectively.

Some artists have experienced a financial step change as a result of working with a CPP Place. However shrinking budgets are compromising several CPP Places' ambitions for realising large scale projects.

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### Recommendation 5

Arts Council England works with CPP to bring together potential partners from academia, health and arts sectors to explore a national strategy for developing artists' socially engaged practice.

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### Recommendation 6

Arts Council England reviews future CPP budgets and provides advice to CPP Places to ensure that the social and artistic benefits of commissioning art of larger scale and ambition can be developed and sustained beyond the first three year cycle of funding.



## What is the impact of Creative People and Places on artistic practice?

CPP teams and artists observed and reflected on a range of impacts in their practice - some small shifts and some more profound changes - as a result of the CPP commissions.

Artists and CPP teams reported a clear shift in the power dynamic between themselves and local participants, to a more equal footing, which they found motivating and refreshing in terms of their social and ethical values. CPP teams and artists sense that their commissions are influencing the wider status and value of social engaged artistic practice. Many commented on the level of investment in socially engaged practice that has been made by Arts Council England and the wish to see the practice 'mainstreamed' rather than part of what are perceived by them as 'peripheral' funding streams.

Several artists described how CPP commissions had made direct impacts on their artistic practice, e.g. experimenting with new art forms, working on a larger scale, relocation and artistic growth. Placing a high value on socially engaged practice, giving confidence to artists who co-create with communities, validating and supporting the artists development - these are all perceived by CPPs and artists as the positive impacts of their approach to commissioning artists to make new socially engaged, participatory work.

This research has highlighted the importance of asking artists about the influence on their practice through working with CPP Places and what they think of the work they make. An ideal next step to this research would be to interview a larger sample of artists across the wide range of art forms and scales of work commissioned, including a control group who have been commissioned by other agencies - for

example by organisations funded by Arts Council England as part of its National Portfolio (NPOs).

Several artists talked about the significance of this considerable body of work commissioned by CPP Places, supported by Arts Council England, and asked 'What happens to the art afterwards?' They expressed strong views about how little critical attention was given to the art itself, as compared to the process of creating the art, thereby losing the potential both to impact artistic practice and to give more credibility to the field of socially engaged art.

Artists spoke about how the work they are making with communities in CPP Places is part of social history— created during a time when communities are experiencing the most acute social, political and cultural impacts of economic austerity. They talked about the importance of documenting this work and asked whether there should be a central archive of CPP art and a major curated CPP retrospective. CPP teams raised questions around how the work could be curated and shown effectively and authentically. The work commissioned by CPP Places is about time-based and interactive processes as well as ephemeral and tangible outcomes. Is there a different way of curating that kind of work?

40% of CPP Places surveyed have toured their new commissions nationally and two places internationally. This is impressive and suggests a demand for the kind of work Creative People and Places is creating. The use of digital platforms by some CPP Places has also served to expand the national and global reach of artists' work. There is much potential scope to develop strategic partnerships and extend the artistic scope and audience reach of CPP projects.

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**Recommendation 7**

The CPP Network conducts further research on the impact of Creative People and Places on artist practice. This should be with a representative sample of artists commissioned by CPP Places plus a control group who have been commissioned by NPOs to deliver socially engaged, participatory practice.

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**Recommendation 8**

CPP Network works with Arts Council England to identify partners e.g. an academic institution, existing archive projects, Heritage Lottery Fund, who could help them take forward archiving the art commissioned by Creative People and Places projects 2013-2023.

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**Recommendation 9**

CPP Network works with Arts Council England and a leading gallery/museum to curate and present a retrospective of Creative People and Places artist commissions 2013-2018.

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**Recommendation 10**

CPP Network puts forward the suggestion to Arts Council that CPP artworks be purchased for the Arts Council England collection.

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**Recommendation 11**

Further research is conducted by CPP Network, with partners, into the characteristics of CPP commissions that have toured nationally and internationally. What is it that made them suitable for taking up by other locations and how could this influence future CPP commissions?

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**Recommendation 12**

CPP Network explores how a strategic relationship between CPP Places and digital partners such as The Space and NESTA can develop and expand opportunities to create and share content nationally and globally.

