

A Response to the 1:1 FUND

Sam Metz

Sam Metz is an artist based in Hull who researches, creates and reflects on the concept of what they refer to as choreographic objects. Sam has collaborated with the performance artist David Clarkson to create body-based live art, and has been a member of Guerrilla Art Lab, a queer, feminist, live art, performance collective since 2016.

As an emerging curator Sam is influenced by disability-led approaches to interpretation, particularly focusing on sensory modalities of understanding neglected in traditional forms of art museum interpretation, such as touch. Sam explores methods of providing art historical, social, material interpretation– that different people can use in different ways to help them make meaning from what they are looking at.

Sam emailed the team shortly after the 1:1 FUND call for entries was launched in September, enquiring about the updated process and expressing concern that some of the more relational and responsive elements of our recent processes – such as individual feedback – would not feature within this new approach. We invited Sam to write this commission to document their concerns and suggestions as expressed in our email correspondence. Sam has specialist knowledge of inclusive and disability-led practice, and have been part of selection processes as part of the PANIC! Steering Group through The Tetley in Leeds. Sam's text was written after the 1:1 FUND opened for applications.

Jerwood Arts' pilot application process and use of a random generator for its 1:1 FUND aimed to solve a number of very real problems, including the near impossibility of selectors being able to offer meaningful feedback to the many hundreds of applicants for a vanishingly small number of prestigious awards. Artists' work is, by and large, not only precarious but also dependent on repeated cycles of grant applications that result, with mathematical inevitability, in more rejections than acceptances. To require artists to invest unpaid time in an application that they know is not just unlikely to be accepted but unlikely ever to be read feels like a damaging shift away from an understanding of the application process as relational – a critical conversation between practitioners.

Their solution – a much-abridged initial application, with artists then shortlisted via a random number generator – may address issues of capacity and free staff to work more closely with selected artists but risks sacrificing the care and consideration due to those on the other side of that process. The random generator applied was also pitched to remove bias from selection. Something that, for me, is best achieved by diversifying selection panels, which Jerwood Arts already works to do in relation to other funds. Critically, for me, the pilot approach does very little to support artists who don't know that a fund like this is for them. As a disabled artist, when I see a disabled artist on a panel I am immediately reassured. Diversifying the panel can mean seeing yourself reflected in the organisation and reassured to apply. Receiving feedback from artists can therefore be pivotal.

My knowledge of Jerwood Arts' previous excellent practice, and my own experience of having worked with, and been funded and supported by them, means that I hugely respect the organisation and have no doubt that their intentions for the pilot are good. What I would like to do here is simply to voice my personal understanding of the value of the application process for artists, particularly those in the formative stages of their career, and how that is in danger of being lost.

For me, something about diminishing agency through a random generator didn't seem to be caring. A call out has the potential to be relational: a dialogue between you, the organisation and other artists. A philosophy of interdependence recognises the need to both receive and give care; essentially, the care taken to construct an application feels like it needs care at the other end. This philosophy (introduced in the recent publication by the Care Collective, *The Care Manifesto*) also reminds us that interdependence cuts through social hierarchies, so that renowned artists are reliant on support as much as emerging or underrepresented artists. Feedback from respected peers emphasises learning transmission between more and less-experienced artists as bi-directional, horizontal and communicative. Jerwood are in many areas of their work diminishing individualism and favouring coproduction, peer support and collaborative knowledge exchange. The random generator for me, by contrast means the 'other end' is a dead end, not a more modern one that shares practice among artists and organisations and which enables a diversification of voices.

I think that it can be possible to develop confidence and ability through the application writing process – but only if there is meaningful feedback. As a disabled artist who receives application support it feels problematic to engage support in a proposal that is likely not to be read and to not value my collaborator. As a practising artist who is still an emerging artist, the opportunity presented by a fund can sometimes be exposing, where you feel forced to share an idea before it is ready because you don't know when funding will be available again or conversely where you are confident in an idea or approach but don't know if it is the kind of work that matches the funder and the needs of the fund. This position can be underscored by precarity, isolation and disenchantment. Precarity is the position of working with unstable income streams in a society in the UK that has seen austerity followed by a pandemic and cuts to the arts. Isolation is widespread, particularly for disabled artists, like myself, who might be unable to access peer support, accessible studios and events. Disenchantment (inevitably) follows because to situate yourself as an artist responding to call-outs, commissions and opportunities can mean repeated rejection. Post education, finding space for creative knowledge exchange and collaboration can be rare; it's hard to know what your peers think about your work. Receiving considerate written feedback about your practice forms a necessary part of lifelong learning and development.

Personally, despite all the inherent risk of being an artist, I sometimes find it motivating to be able to send out work to a panel of artists. You hope that your written application acts as a proxy for the conversation you might have with them were you to meet. Not being able to gauge peers' interest in your work risks barriers to future engagement, due to a lack of reassurance about the value of your work, but it also reduces the ability to have critical conversations between practitioners.

I wonder if it would be possible to engage the random generator approach again utilising a simple expression of interest, with no requirement to describe or advocate for your work, and then support selected people throughout the whole application-writing process. An approach of that kind would enable feedback and care for both the team and applicants, restoring the relational process and becoming a real opportunity for artist development.