art vs rehab

The Role of Art Practitioners' Own Art Practice

Critical Tool Kit

The Role of Art Practitioners' Own Art Practice

Introduction

ART vs REHAB is a platform for people working in art and rehabilitation; including those working creatively in addiction, the criminal justice system, homelessness and mental health. It is a catalyst for criticality and change in the field, based on the principles of open innovation and collaborative practice

The ART vs REHAB tool kits are the result of an ongoing conversation between over one hundred artists, therapists, academics, service users, service providers, funders and commissioners. They include contributions from...

Aidan Gray, Aidan Moesby, Ailsa Hollond, Alberto Duman, Alison Rooke, Antenisio Santos, Beth Elliott, Chloé Gayet, Christopher Wait, David Clegg, David Fried, Dean Whittington, Eleanor Shipman, Emilie Taylor, Errol Francis, Hannah Hull, Ian Patel, Ismail Ali, Jacqueline McCullough, Jamie Griffiths, Jane Fradgley, Jenny Price, Jenny Richards, Jessica Akerman, Jodie Sadler, Jonathan Banks, Kim Keith, Lesley Oakley, Linda Bartoli, Louise Prince, Louise Shelley, Manjinder Sidhu, Mark Prest, Martyn Cheesman, Matthew Taylor, Michelle Baharier, Myles Stewart, Paddy Gormley, Patricia Ferguson, Rhiannon Evans, Richard Ings, Sam Curtis, Sara Kewly Hyde, Sarah & Thomas Tobias, Sarah Jay, Scott Farlow, Silvia Battista, Simon McCormack, Sophie Hope, Susan McNally, Tam Joseph, Theresa Nash, The Vacuum Cleaner and Will Essilfie

This initiative was conceived by artist and researcher, Hannah Hull, and is supported by Arts Council England, TCCE [The Culture Capital Exchange], ICCE [Institute of Creative and Cultural Entrepreneurship, Goldsmiths] and C4CC [The Centre for Creative Collaboration]

Graphic facilitation and design by Jo Buchan

Other ART vs REHAB Tool Kits

• Artists vs Art Therapists

• Criticality and Evaluation within a Culture of Optimism

• The "Other" and the Mental Health History of Practitioners

• Providing and Promoting Social Inclusion: One in the Same?

• The Role of Art Institutions in Art Outreach

For more information about ART vs REHAB please visit **www.artvsrehab.com**

Contents…

The Role of Art Practitioners' Own Art Practice

This tool kit seeks to examine the relationship between art practitioners' personal art practice and their outreach art practice [i.e. community projects, gallery education, art and health, etc]. It will look at the issue of maintaining creative autonomy for artists and participants within rehabilitative settings, where the key concern may not be artistic quality

Using this Tool Kit

The tool kit is designed to be used by a mixed group of practitioners working within art and rehabilitation. This may include artists, therapists, academics, service users, service providers, funders and commissioners

If you are working as a group, it is recommended that the group is as diverse as possible. However, many activities can be undertaken alone or in pairs

The amount of time you will need to complete tasks will depend on the size of your group. As a guide, a group of ten people should allow 30 minutes per task, approximately three hours per tool kit

The content of this tool kit has been contributed by a range of practitioners on the basis that it is freely available to support development in the field. You may not sell or charge for access to any tool kit content

Facets of Practice

Hannah Hull

The aim of this exercise is to compare the priorities of your personal and outreach art practice, locate any discrepancies, and imagine how you could bring these two practices more in line with one another

Each take a 'personal art practice' and an 'outreach art practice' worksheet

Write key facets of each respective practice on the blank squares, e.g. developing confidence / gallery exhibitions / conceptual thinking / painting / autonomy / workshops / etc

Cut out the cubes and assemble using glue or tape

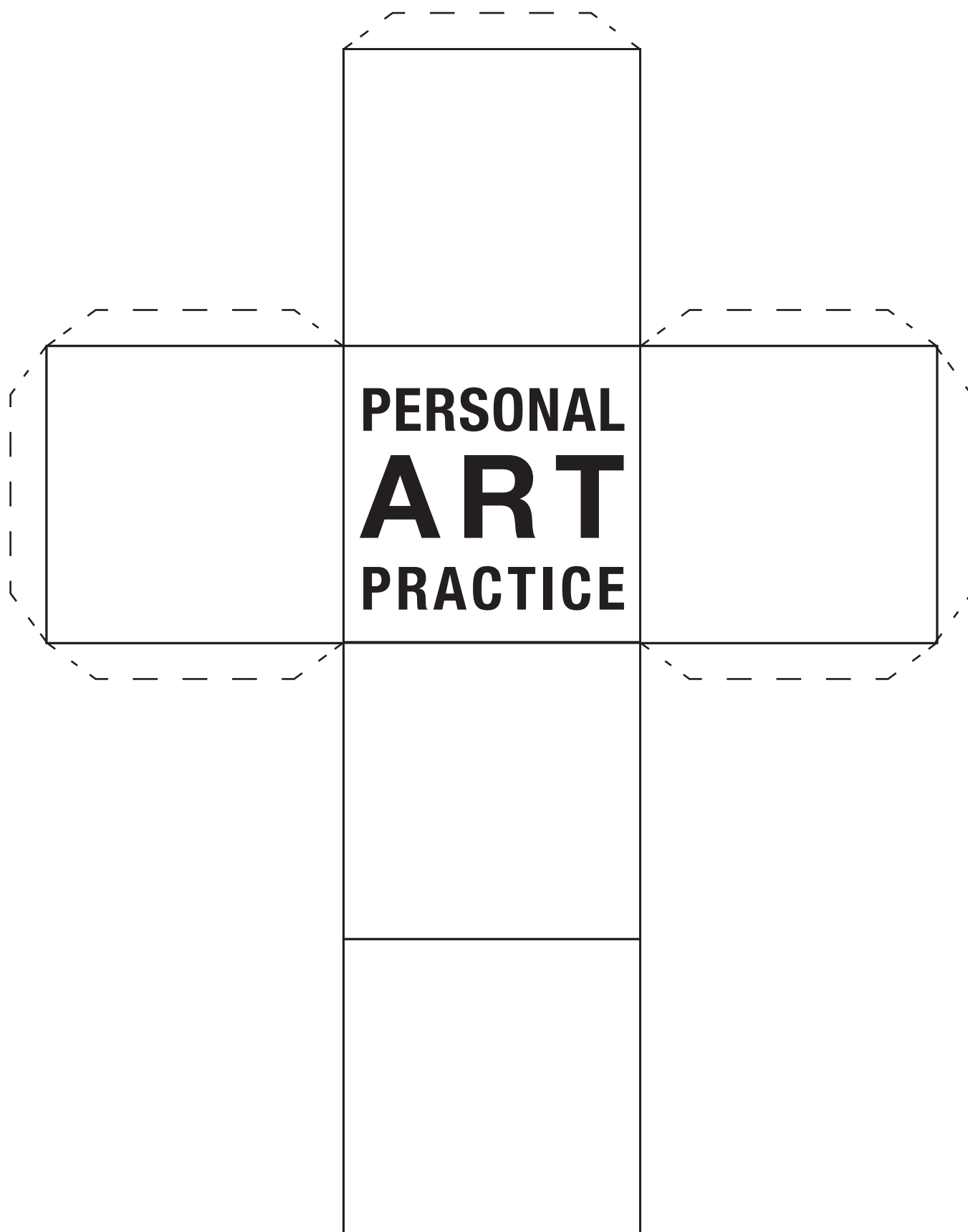**Each person presents their two cubes, reflecting on...**

• The differences between their two cubes

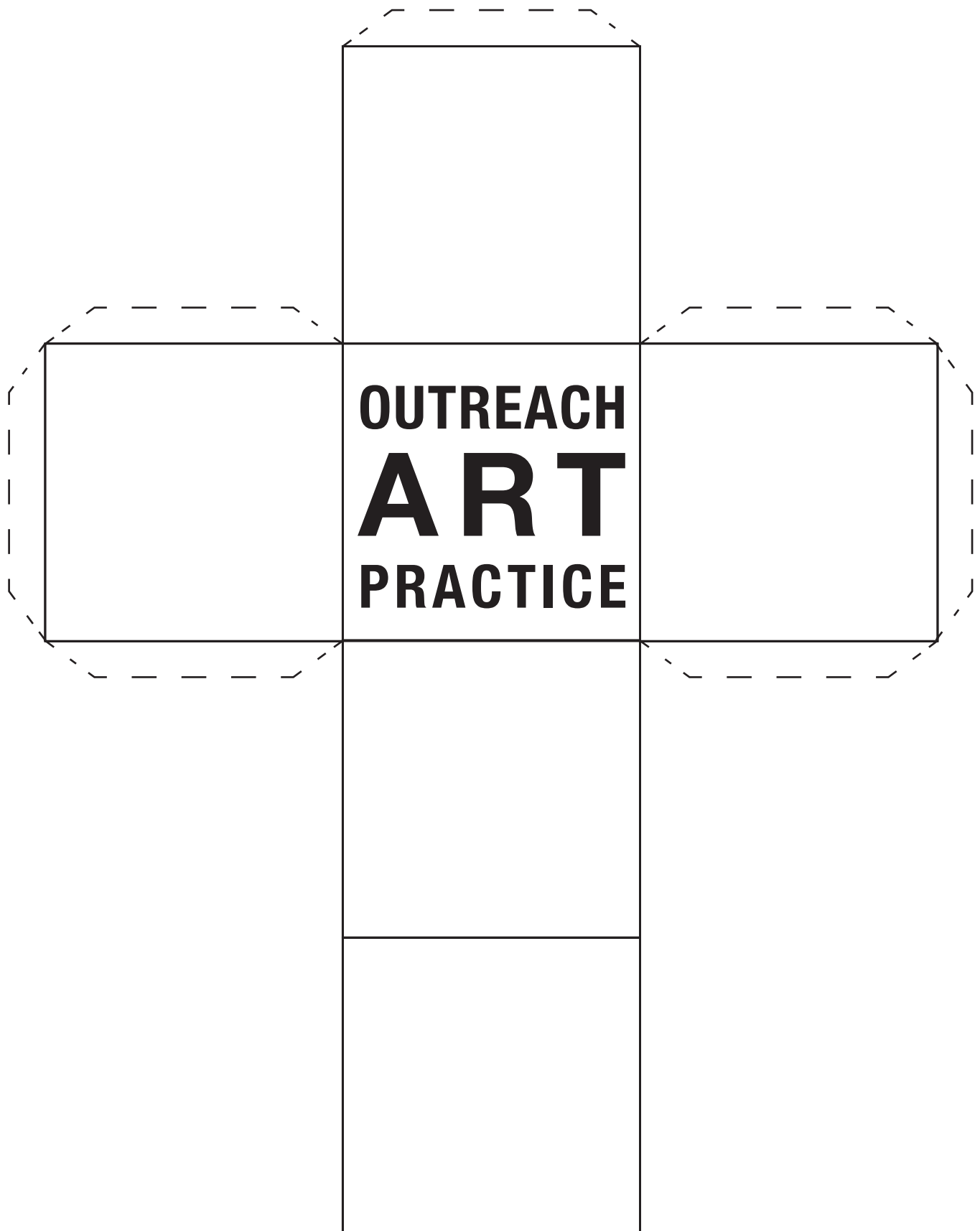• Whether they would like to bring them more in line with each other and how they might go about doing that

Materials
Glue or tape, pens, scissors
Resource Sheets for
Facets of Practice

PERSONAL
ART
PRACTICE

OUTREACH
ART
PRACTICE

Uncomfortable Communication

Rhiannon Evans

The purpose of this task is to raise questions about how we enable art making and communicate ideas when working with people who may be in an uncomfortable position. The term 'uncomfortable' is meant in the broadest sense, and the discomfort could be temporary or long-term, mental or physical

Have a conversation with the person next to you about your proposed art outreach work. Only one of you can speak. The other must communicate without using words

Each pair presents their experience to the group

Have a conversation with the person next to you as above. One person assumes a physically uncomfortable position. For example, sitting on their legs or with one arm bent behind their back

Each pair presents their experience to the group

As a group, discuss the following questions…

• How do we navigate situations where our participants may have more immediate needs than our role is there to provide for?

• Where is the line between, for example, care work and art teaching when working in a care setting?

• How do we negotiate this line with ourselves, our clients and our employers?
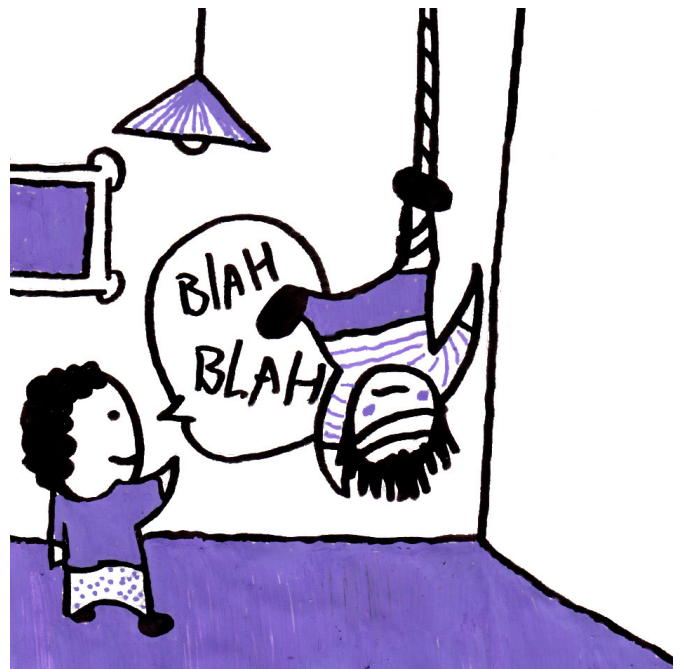
Star Priorities

Eleanor Shipman

This task asks us to consider our over-arching priorities, and where these sit on a scale from art practice to outreach practice. It invites others to discuss their perception of these priorities and open up a debate

Place the **Personal Art Practice** and **Outreach Art Practice** signs at either end of a table to form a scale

Cut out the stars

Each take three stars and write on the three most important elements of your practice as a whole

Put the star priorities together in a pile

As a group, discuss each star priority's relevance to **Personal Art Practice** and **Outreach Art Practice**

Decide a point on the scale to place each star

As a group, discuss the following...

• Did any priorities come up more than once?

• Which ones and why do you think this is?

• Which of your elements did other people see different values in?

• Which end of the spectrum did most stars end up at? What does this reveal about the group?

• How many stars fell equidistant between Personal Art Practice and Outreach Art Practice? What does this balance suggest?

Materials
Pens, scissors
Resource Sheets for
Star Priorities

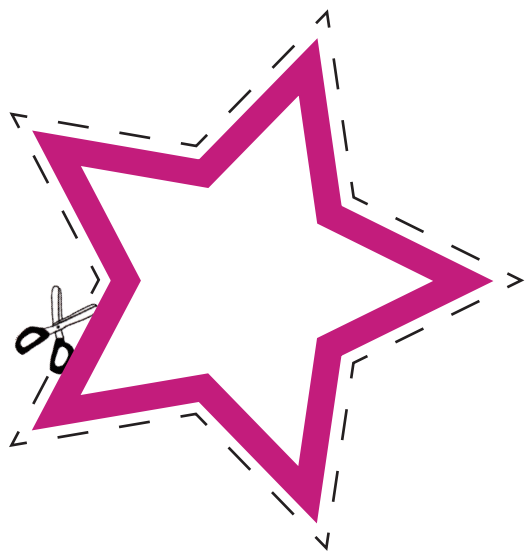✂ -

PERSONAL ART PRACTICE

✂ -

OUTREACH ART PRACTICE

✂ -
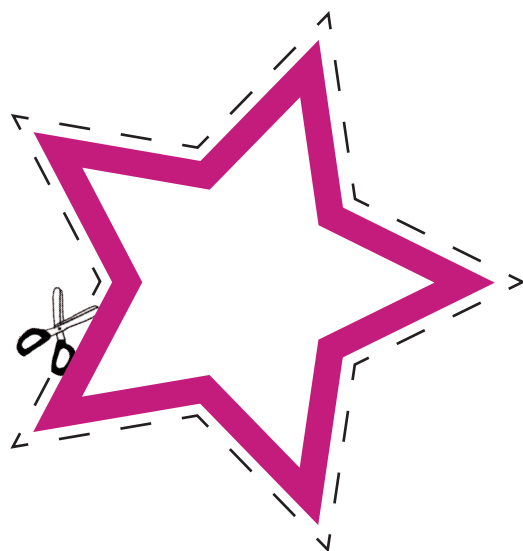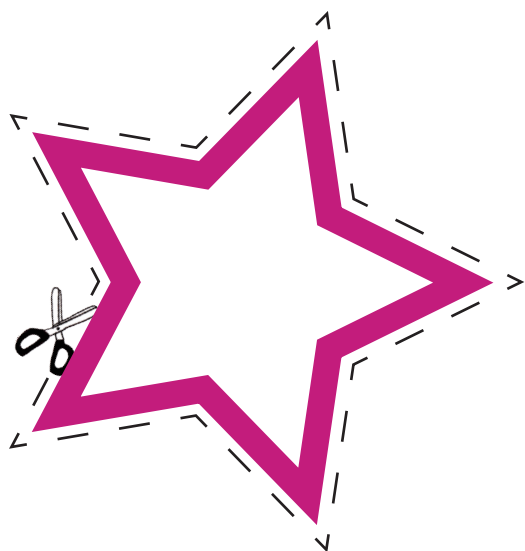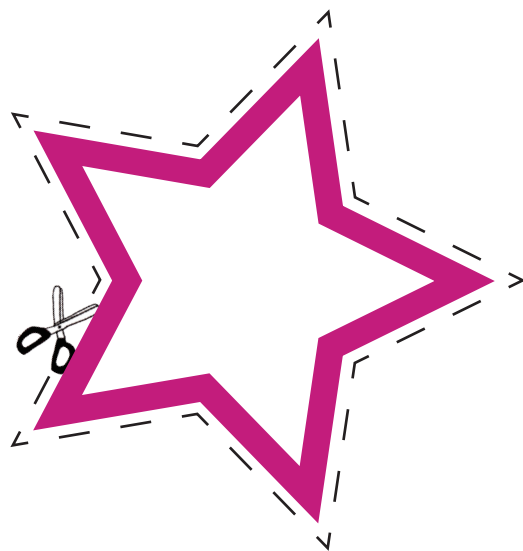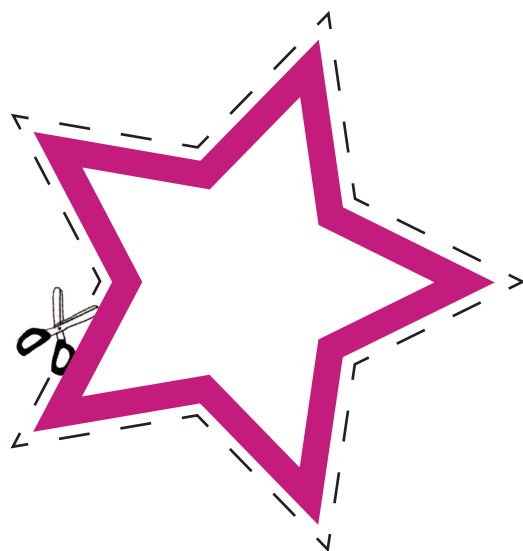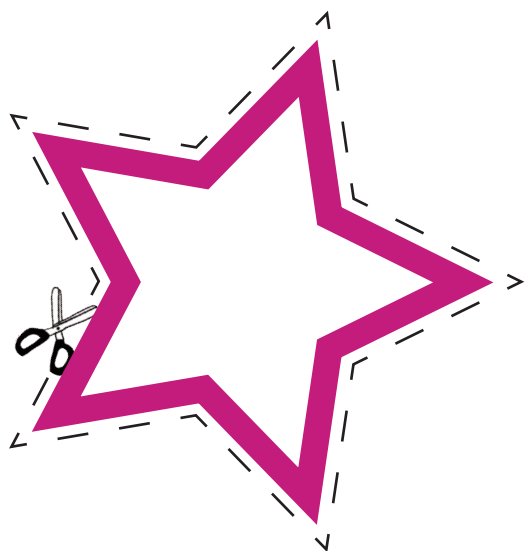
Commodity and Alienation

Hannah Hull

This task will help us to consider our relationship with the current economic system. It is intended to stimulate questions about where our art practice meets with the accepted norms of the art world, and where the art world meets with the accepted norms of our financial system

Individually, read the essay extract on the resource sheet, **The Art Market: Affluence and Degradation by** Ian Burn

Make notes on the ideas and phrases that you find of interest

As a group, discuss your notes

Materials
Resource Sheets for
Commodity and Alienation

Resource Sheet 1 for
Commodity and Alienation

The Art Market: Affluence and Degradation Ian Burn *[1975]*

Impending economic crisis has forced many deeply lurking problems into the open. Art sales are declining and there is an air of pessimism. The sense of opulence of the 1960s has gone to dust. As artists, we have tended to understand the art market only in its reward capacity, preferring to ignore the "dismal science" of economics. But no longer, it seems. While it may once have seemed an exaggeration of economic determinism to regard works of art as "merely" commodities in an economic exchange, it is now pretty plain that our entire lives have become so extensively constituted in these terms that we cannot any longer pretend otherwise. Not only do works of art end up as commodities, but there is also an overwhelming sense in which works of art start off as commodities.

Faced with this impasse, we need alternate historical perspectives in order to throw light on some of the most basic of social relations, to perceive the lacuna between what we think we do and what we actually do in the world. The historical relations of up-to-date modern art are the market relations of a capitalist society. That much I believe is obvious to everyone. What we have seen more recently is the power of market values to distort all other values, so even the concept of what is and is not acceptable as "work" is defined first and fundamentally by the market and only secondly by "creative urges" (etc.). This has been the price of internalizing an intensely capitalistic mode of production.

[…]

Putting this into a familiar New York perspective: we have all been enticed by the prospect of endless market expansion which it seems, oddly enough, we have internalized in the idea of an endlessly innovative avant-gardist growth.

[…]

In case it appears I am overstating the role of United States capitalism in all this, let me emphasize the obvious, that the history of modern art from its beginnings was nurtured within a number of industrialized societies, not just America. Looking closer at that history, with its unrelenting emphasis on an "art-for-art's-sake" ideology, we become conscious of the ever increasing role played by a neutered formalism - at the expense of our possibility of content. The stress on exclusively formal innovation had the aftermath of content in its last gasp being reduced to such vacua as "color," "edge," "process," "ideas," "image," etc. plus a lot of fatuous jargon about qualities symbolized through these (c.f. especially Greenberg's account of modernism, but also most issues of Artforum and other magazines). This is formalism taken to its ultimate empty conclusions: it is what we have lauded as pure art . . . the impossibility of content, of saying anything whatsoever. The tradition of formalism has left me largely incapable of expressing through "my art" those very things about which I have the greatest misgivings— and so incapable of changing anything through "my art." These ideological fetters have conclusively eradicated every possibility of a social practice in relation to art, even the thought of it - the expression of modern art has become the rejection of society and of our social beings. Now, obviously the United States isn't to blame for all of this, but it certainly deserves a lot of the credit for bringing it to a remarkable and unprecedented pitch. No longer just producing an art for a privileged middle-class, it has burgeoned into a spectacularly elitist art, remote even from its own producers' actual lives and problems.

What can you expect to challenge in the real world with "color," "edge," "process," systems, modules, etc. as your arguments?

Resource Sheet 2 for
Commodity and Alienation

Can you be any more than a manipulated puppet if these are your "professional" arguments? Moreover, when you add to this picture thousands upon thousands of artists in all corners of the modern art empire tackling American formalism in the belief that it is the one "true art"—that's when it is possible to see how preposterous and finally downright degrading it has become!

Needless to say, it is easy for me to identify with some points of the classic nineteenth century theses about alienation. There it was argued that alienation is the process whereby human values are projected outside of us and achieve an existence independent of us, and over us, and this is an essential condition for the functioning of capitalism. We are all familiar with the romanticized notions about the work of art "embodying the soul of the artist." Well, perhaps historically this has taken on mythic proportions, but there is a very real sense in which everything produced ought to bear some personal relation to who makes it. However, once my work of art enters the art market, it takes on a power independent of me and this strikes me as a form of estrangement from what I have produced, an alienation from my own experiences; and the more I produce the more I deprive myself of my "means of life." Yet I find I can only maintain myself by continuing in the same fashion. So, while I may retain economic ownership over my labor and means of production (thus giving me a sense of "freedom"), I am still psychologically and socially alienated from what I produce. Once entering the market, it becomes an object foreign to me - but without the market I don't recognize it, because it is defined via the market which I have internalized. Don't we all experience this to greater or lesser degrees? As a result, myself-as-an-artist has become a stranger to me, a figure over whom I have little power or control. This is today's blunt reality of alienation. No longer merely having lost the product of our labor, our ability to create is profoundly impaired . . . and this is also expressed in my relation to you, and burgeons in the relation you can have to what I produce.

Often-heard remarks implying that it is not enough to be "just an artist" are merely public admissions that, as a role in society, "artist" is a sterile one. More pointedly, this sheds light on the prevailing concept of "artist": it has become an integral part of the meaning of the concept "artist" that it is politically conservative (or, at its more adventuristic, reactionary), and that remains its sole possible political role - hence its continuing great value as propaganda for an imperious culture. This is clearly reflected in the desperation of more and more artists to escape their political impotence, in their attempts to reconcile the paradoxicality of their lives wrought by being hopefully "radical" in politics but necessarily "conservative" in art.

[...]

In this light, most of the chatter about "plurality" in the contemporary scene comes over as so much liberal claptrap. What use is a sort of "freedom" which can have no other effect than reinforcing the status quo?

Whatever we are able to accomplish now, my point is that transforming our reality is no longer a question of just making more art - it is a matter of realizing the enormous social vectoring of the problem and opportunistically taking advantage of what social tools we have.

Of one thing I am certain: anything we might call radical theory in the arts will have to be solidly constructed in all its social dimensions. But even then it may not be a question of how much we might accomplish, since it might take something as catastrophic as a collapse in the economic structure of this society to have any substantial effect on the careening superstructure of modern American art.

This text first appeared in Artforum

[April 1975, pp. 34–37]

Provocations for Group Discussion

As a group, discuss the following questions...

You may wish to listen to the The Role of Art Practitioners' Own Art Practice podcast available at **www.artvsrehab.com** to stimulate your thoughts

Does your outreach art practice reflect your own art practice?

If you wrote an art outreach brief, how would it differ from existing briefs?

What do our participants lose if we lose our autonomy?

How do we protect/maintain our art practice?

Do funders and commissioners really understand art practice and its social role?

What are the social or 'outreach' benefits of our own art practice?

Are we teachers, collaborators, fellow artists or campaigners?

Postcard Task

Print and cut out enough postcards for everyone in the group

Each take a postcard. Considering the issues you have addressed using this tool kit, think of three things you want to change about your practice/the context of your practice by this time next year

Write these three things - and your address - on the postcard

Put everyone's postcards in a big envelope and send them to...

ART vs REHAB, ICCE, Goldsmiths, University of London, New Cross, London, SE14 6NW

We will post them to you in a year

Examples

"Make time in the diary (and out of it) as I go along to do my own work"

Sarah & Thomas Tobias

"Challenge brief / commissioners' expectations of output requirements"

Scott Farlow

"To have an independent outreach practice"

Sara Kewly Hyde

Materials
Scissors, pens,
big envelope, stamp
Resource Sheet for **Postcard Task**

POST CARD

art vs
rehab

USEFUL QUOTES

"What did she do that we couldn't...?"

Phrase heard in a conversation about art

"It ain't what you do, it's the way that you do it, and that's what gets results"

Melvin "Sy" Oliver and James "Trummy" Young

"The carers don't come to get her up till half-ten in the morning"

Phrase heard in a conversation about care

"Learning without thought is labour lost; thought without learning is perilous."

Confucius

"Out of practice means out of mind"

Saying

"Be the change you want to see in the world"

Saying

"The attitude that nature is chaotic and that the artist puts order into it is a very absurd point of view, I think. All that we can hope for is to put some order into ourselves."

Willem de Kooning

"Do what you can, and confess frankly what you are unable to do; neither let your effort be shortened for fear of failure, nor your confession silenced for fear of shame."

John Ruskin

"The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing. One cannot help but be in awe when he contemplates the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvellous structure of reality. It is enough if one tries merely to comprehend a little of this mystery every day. Never lose a holy curiosity"

Albert Einstein

"Mountain climbers climb mountains because they are there, artists make art because it isn't"

Famous quote with addition from David Clegg's old college tutor

"Artists make art because they have to"

David Clegg's response to this quote

"There's a function for art and artists which is about doing things that might not work or doing things which do work but might throw up problems… they're complexifiers, [and] the purpose of complexity is to encourage development – throwing up options and, in creating a problem, you create a solution."

Alistair Hudson

FURTHER READING

Adding Complexity to Confusion
Adam Sutherland

The Art of Participation
Interview with Clare Bishop, Art Forum *[available online]*

Art U Need
Bob and Roberta Smith

Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art
Grant Kester

Critical Art Practice, Policy and Cultural Democracy: Opportunity in Contradiction
Kate Dumbleton

Dry: A Memoir
Augusten Burroughs

Goodbye, Mr. Wonderful
Chris McCully

If This Is a Man / The Truce and The Drowned and The Saved
Primo Levi

Language and Colour
Theo Van Leeuwen

Mental Fight
Ben Okri

School Kills Creativity
Ted Talk by Ken Robinson *[available online]*