

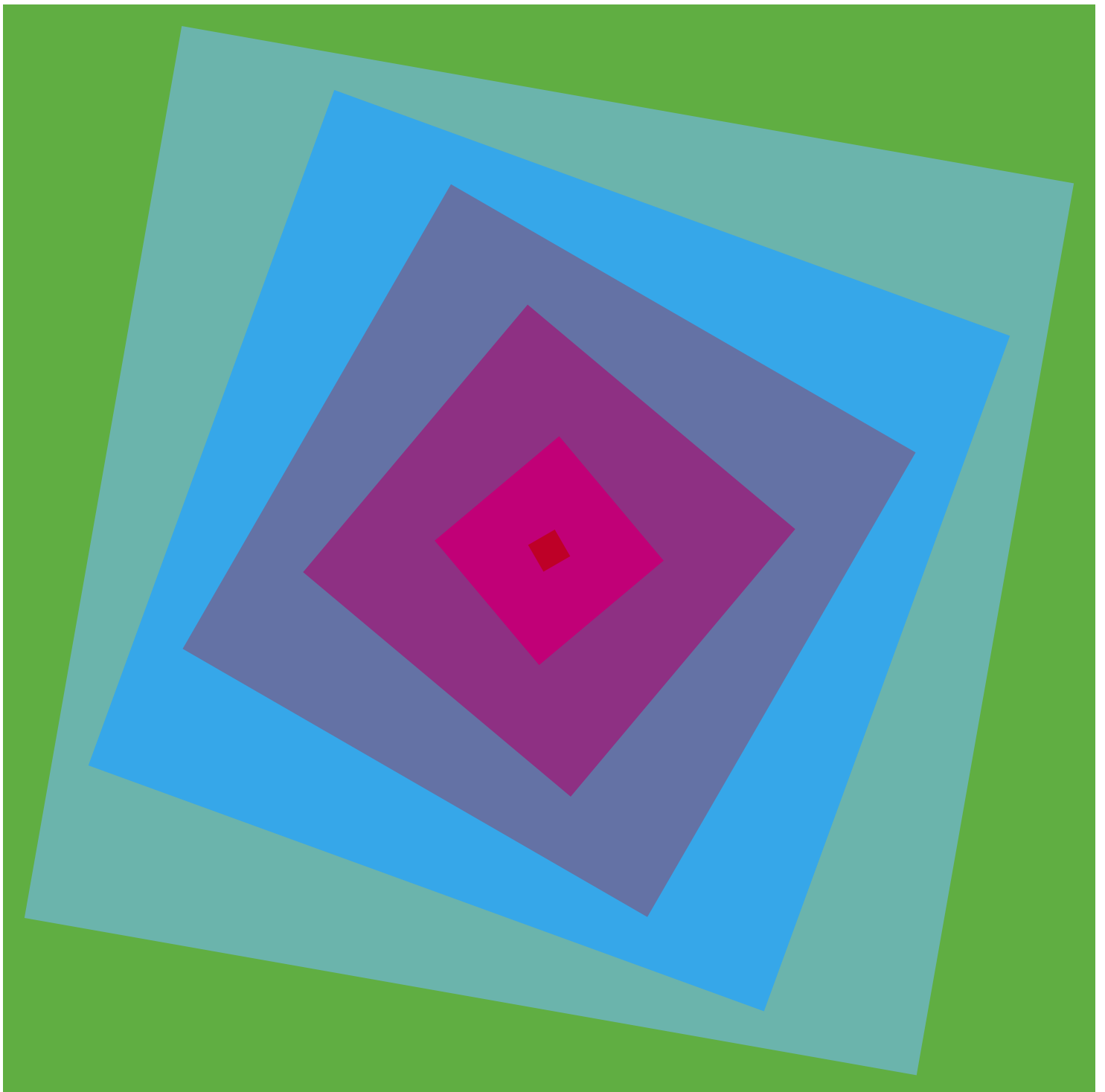
Building a More Diverse and Inclusive Public Art Sector

A Research Project

Commissioned by Beam

Researched and Written by Boseda Olawoye

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About the Author

Beam appointed Boseda Olawoye, a Nottingham based independent Creative Engagement Manager, in the role of Diverse Artist Network Coordinator to carry out this research over a period of 9 months.

Introduction

This research and report aims to explore and address why Artist commissioning opportunities in the area of public art do not seem to attract a diverse range of Artists from different backgrounds. The need for this research has been informed by Beam's own diversity monitoring, anecdotal evidence and the research of others in the sector. They wanted to ask - 'How can we make the sector more fair and equitable?'

It is recognised that through this report we have not drawn input from the full range of protected characteristics and intersectionalities, and recognise that whilst this research is an important starting point and a snapshot of a range of views, there is still much more to be done. This report serves as a useful starting point for further and continued exploration.

I started in post in April 2022 and between May and August, worked with Beam's public art consultants to research and engage a network of diverse organisations and diverse Artists at varying career stages to explore the barriers they face in developing their practice in the public art sector. I firstly conducted a series of ten online interviews with producers and directors whose organisations cross a range of practices - including community engagement, public art, outdoor art, community arts and community-led practice. It was really interesting to hear the views of producers who shared their frustrations about the public art sector - particularly working within the public and private sector. There was also a strong reaction to the connotations around the term 'public art' itself.

Between August and December 2022, I conducted a series of online listening sessions with nine diverse Artists at different stages of their career from across the UK to discuss their experiences in the sector, how they define their practice, the term 'public art' and what change is needed to be more inclusive for Artists. It was fascinating to hear how Artists experience working on public realm projects commissioned by arts organisations and the public sector. I was also unaware of the breadth of skill, expertise and knowledge an Artist needs to create permanent and temporary work in public spaces as well as the importance of being able to communicate their vision to clients such as local authorities.

The research raised more questions than answers. Who is commissioning the work? What is classed as art in the public realm? What kind of work are Artists from under-represented groups interested in creating?

Context

Beam is a cultural development organisation working across the North of England, their inclusive approach champions, celebrates and engages Artists and communities to shape and animate thriving places.

Beam aims to create a culture that encourages and values diversity, and that appoints, rewards and promotes board members, staff and freelancers based on merit. They are committed to taking positive action to address lack of equity within their working practices and to being an anti-racist organisation.

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion are at the heart of Beam's new business plan (2022-26) and they are working to implement tangible positive change over the next four years.

Informed by observational and monitoring data, Beam recognised that Artist commission opportunities were not attracting enough applications from Artists with protected characteristics or from marginalised communities and therefore there is an urgent need to explore potential barriers and take action to address them.

The Covid-19 pandemic brought inequalities to the fore and increased the need for high quality and truly inclusive public spaces to support our health and wellbeing.

During 2021, Beam was mentored by Inc Arts UK through the Creative England Advance mentoring programme (in partnership with Wakefield Council). This has been influential in exploring Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) issues and creating a roadmap for organisational change. It has also enabled Beam to start defining what the term diversity means to them, which includes all the protected characteristics included in the Equality Act 2010 - age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage or civil partnership status; pregnancy and maternity; race (including ethnic or national origin); religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation; with the addition of social class.

In order to be truly inclusive, it is important that Beam also consider intersectionality and recognise overlapping identities and that everyone has their own unique experiences of marginalisation and oppression.

The report is presented in four parts and includes:

1. **Artist Voice and Perspective** - Responses and quotes from the interviews with Artists from a range of practices about their experiences in the sector.
2. **Public Art Producers** - A summary of the methods, approaches and practices arts organisations and public art producers have used to reach, support and work with a range of diverse Artists to produce public art/ work in the public realm.
3. **Engaging with the Wider Sector** - Sector wide equity, diversity and inclusion reports and research.
4. **Research Phase Conclusions** - Summary of conclusions.



Artist Voice & Perspective

Artist Listening Sessions:
October to December 2022

Working in collaboration with Beam's Public Art Consultants, I compiled a list of public realm Artists from diverse backgrounds and invited them to take part in a one-to-one conversation, arranged at a time that suited them.

Nine Artists responded to the invitation and were sent a series of key questions in advance about how they define their practice, their experience of developing their careers and what changes they feel need to be made in the sector to support under-represented Artists.

All Artists were paid for their time with their responses remaining anonymous. Our conversations ranged in length from one and half to over two hours, offering a unique and honest insight into the challenges Artists face and how these can be addressed in the future.

How are Artists describing their practice?

"Art in the public realm."

"Tend to use community art instead of public art."

"I shifted my practice to focus on people, using the collaborative approach. So the outcome was more abstract and responsive to who you work with."

"I make art for my people, make art to be experienced by the public. The community where I am from, the political underclass."

"I don't use the term public art and don't categorise my practice. Previously my practice was illustration and I was seen as a commercial Artist. So I don't like to be put in a box. But it also depends who you are talking to."

"Trained as a landscape architect and am interested in how my work integrates into a place."

"My work is non-specific to any arts practice. The most important thing for me is that my work/ art communicates with people, engages with audiences to provoke a conversation."

Experience of applying for public art/ art in public realm commissions.

When applying for a public art/ public realm commission, the amount of time and written work required is a real barrier for Artists in terms of accessibility.

"Tried to apply and started applications, but I have ADHD. The amount of written work that is required is too much."

"The process of applying for a public art commission and the amount of written work required is too much. This is work in itself and Artists should be paid for their time."

"Call outs are confusing, pretentious terminology, councils are very institutional and use Artists to solve problems they actually can't solve themselves. Councils ask for too much from one individual Artist and with many outcomes."

"Learn how to read briefs. Considering what the commissioner wants and is looking for. Very specific and thought about how my work fitted. This process really helped me to clarify my ideas and a way of developing my practice."

"These opportunities are actually rigged in my favour as an Artist. I have a unique combination of skills that make it easy for me to apply and secure commissions. They include my organisational skills, good at writing essays - useful when writing proposals, being able to sell what you are going to do to a non arts audience, clients and partners."

"Public art commissions really don't suit my practice as they are outcome driven. Commissioning Artists to develop the project with a final design. There needs to be more faith in things needing to develop through conversation."

What processes have supported or stopped you applying for public art commissions?

"If they (the commissioner) are asking Artists to work with people, how can they decide what the final output should be? Local residents are not being asked or involved from the start? What's the support for Artists working with people? Artists may need support. There really needs to be an open discussion about ethics, morals and values working within communities."

"There's a clear issue and push back with the content of the statements featured on the... billboards. There seems to be more interest in the celebratory text based work rather than statements about race, identity, racism, police brutality and immigration in the UK."

"Making multiple applications for commissions is additional work. Middle class people have the disposable income to wait."

"The briefs are not always good enough in terms of pay. White middle-class men are everywhere and at all levels. Public art consultants are female, wealthy, middle class and well brought up. Arts consultants are a good starting point in terms of how they commission public art. Much better public briefs, more localised long term projects that actually benefit the public."

"Stopped applying for commissions because of the amount of work required. Artists need to be paid for their time (with lengthy applications). Last open call I considered was a huge application, excessive and required a project plan. It was the same amount of work needed to complete an Arts Council England application."

Experience of delivering public art/ public realm commissions.

"I am currently working and supporting a young sculptor on a public art piece in a woodland setting. There have been some complications and delays with the whole process and I think the sculptor I'm working with will not want to work on a public art commission again. It has taken so long for this project to be realised."

"It would really help if Artists were brought in much earlier. Currently working on a commission working in collaboration with local residents who do not want new private housing to be built on a housing estate in Nobody has talked to the local residents and asked for their opinion and what they actually want."

"Working with men in this environment is not easy for a woman. I have been treated badly, ignored, undermined and it can be emotionally draining. I am a white middle class woman who is confident. However, on the positive side I do mostly work exactly how I want."

"Frustration - commissions are time limited and the project ends. It takes time to build trust with people and it takes a minimum of three months. Give that amount of time you will get much more positive outcomes. Projects with long term funding and are co-created, with people actively involved make more sense."

Challenges and barriers faced trying to start a career as an Artist working in the public realm.

“Being a woman creating large sculptures with the public – as if a woman couldn’t do this. Found it quite insulting. A lot of women end up working as a socially engaged Artist.”

“Not being given the same chances as my peers who are white. Particularly in, certain arts organisations who I have worked for have not given me a solo show. Or following discussions they have suggested that I should get a phd. Why? Have seen other Artists being offered commissions from the same arts organisations.”

“Public engagement. I personally have challenged myself to work with LGBTQ+, refugee and asylum seeker groups. I’m also doing more outreach projects and making art with people who are disabled with no mobility to gain an understanding of working with those groups, best practice. Public art often doesn’t build on legacy. Building links and gaining trust with communities takes time.”

“Not having the experience and having to work for free to gain experience is unsustainable. That situation really needs to be changed and improved. People on lower incomes just won’t be able to do it.”

Support and training needed for under-represented Artists.

“Public Art - training for Artists to include sales and presentation skills and listening to your client. Lead Artists should be paid to mentor local Artists.”

“Provide therapists for wellbeing for Artists. Particularly with the professional impact. This support would be particularly for practitioners as it can be very draining. Acknowledgement of class based privilege in the arts sector.”

“A collective discussion with Artists working in public realm/ public art (those who have been interviewed) online or in person. Continue the conversation as a peer group. Discussions might include the politics of private and public space, commons and the public.”

“What is our understanding of contemporary art? Recognise the values and creativity of different cultures. The barriers are wider in scope. Beam need to be more creative and find out exactly what Artists from these under-represented groups are doing and what it is that excites them? The way to make the arts more inclusive is to create those opportunities.”

“So many Artists need support with the commissioning process and mentoring. It would be good to have an initial conversation with Beam about their values, ethics and process and how they work.”

“Work shadowing and mentoring for early to mid career Artists. It really has to start happening. Both the mentor and Artists shadowing need to be paid for their time.”

Public Art: Terminology and Language

Beam's current definition of 'public art' is broad ranging and encompasses ways in which Artists creatively work in and respond to public spaces that engage in a meaningful way with the community.

This can include temporary or permanent art interventions that may be integrated into hard and soft landscaping, glazing, lighting, street furniture, sculptural, planting, audio works, digital experiences, trails as well as utilising the power of temporary interventions/ happenings to stimulate new perceptions, encourage play or engage people in having a say about where they live.

However, you can see from Artists' responses to the question about the term 'public art' that it provoked a very strong reaction from our interviewees. Public art now is seen as an outdated term from the past or has elitist connotations. This is a major barrier to any under-represented Artists considering a career, applying for commissions in the first instance. The current terminology used by Artists is 'multidisciplinary' or 'Artists working in the public realm' - Artists have a more fluid practice and do not want to be categorised. There is a real shift in terms of the Artists applying for commissions that embed co-production and consultation with local people into the process of creating public realm work in community settings.

This was also echoed by the arts organisations and public art consultancies I interviewed. The term 'Public Art' is mainly used by the public art consultancies, and the Public and Private sectors. Artists did acknowledge that the term used depends on who you are working with or talking to when applying or working on a commission.

"Can be seen as prescriptive or corporate but if you are applying for a public art commission you know what it means. Not sure if the public understands it."

"I think the term public art is just a reference point. It really has particular connotations and reminds me of the 70's and 80's."

"I do use the term public art but we create conversations in the public realm. Using advertising space to be subversive. A lot of the Artists are from the area where the billboards are shown. Public art - is about people, conversations."

"Anything that involves the public in different stages of the project."

"It's a buzz word. The idea that the world actually needs public art. These are polarising times and there's a lot of important issues to explore. For me the best art has something to say about the times we live in. Let's not create an exclusive environment or terminology that just pushes people out."

"All art in galleries is public art. In my understanding of that term I wouldn't use it. It is a genre in itself."

"Useful for certain clients and partners when it's relevant. I am making art for lots of different contexts."





2. Public Art Producers

Listening sessions
public art producers:
May - July 2022

Between May to July, working in collaboration with Beam's Public Art Consultants, I compiled a list of arts organisations who I could approach to interview and discuss best practice in terms of creating a more inclusive and diverse public art sector for under-represented Artists. Outlined below are the list of arts organisations and staff (listed alphabetically), that I met with, and a summary of key findings and recommendations.

- Stephanie Allen, Executive Director, **Arts & Heritage**, national
- Theresa Bergne, Curator/ Producer, **Field Art Projects**, Bristol
- Daniel Bernstein, CEO, **Emergency Exit Arts**, national
- Matt Butt CEO, **Rotherham Open Arts Renaissance (ROAR)**, Rotherham
- Louise Francis & Laura Knight, Public Art Consultants, **Francis Knight**, Kent
- Sharon Gill, Artist & Consultant, **Yorkshire and Humber Visual Art Network (YVAN)**
- Paul Hartley, Director, **In-Situ**, Lancashire
- Riah King-Wall, Public Art Producer, **Bricks Bristol**, Bristol
- Isabella Tulloch Gallego, Programme Manager: Commissions, **We Are Unlimited**, national
- Simon Vaughan, Managing Director + Sam Williams, Producer, **Creative Giants**, Brighton

Outlined below is a summary of observations from my conversations with producers, arts organisations and public art consultancies about the different approaches they use to support and attract under-represented Artists to apply for public realm work.

- Local multidisciplinary Artists interested in public realm work are encouraged to sign up to an email list of opportunities. Artists complete a short form about themselves and their practice and if a suitable project comes up they are contacted directly.
- Public realm opportunities could be shared with Artist-led spaces and networks from a range of art practices and disciplines.
- To simplify the commissioning process Artists submit an expression of interest (max of 2 pages) for the brief only. Only Artists that are short-listed are asked to develop a proposal and are paid £200 for their time.
- Diversifying the interview panel.
- Offer diverse local Artists working in the sector a fee and travel to be part of the interview panel.
- Promote opportunities via arts organisations such as We Are Unlimited or approach diverse public realm Artists and organisations within local/ regional networks. For example: Artists Beam have worked with before, Artists who participated in the Beam listening sessions and their networks.

- Arts organisations that work with disabled Artists are providing a dedicated budget that provides access support for Artists to apply for commissions. This includes hiring professional freelancers to translate via BSL (video) or dyslexic support at a rate of £250 per day.
- A public art consultancy is working in partnership with arts organisations, local councils and SMEs (small to medium size enterprises) to develop public art projects. Grassroots organisations tend to attract diverse Artists.
- What is the role of the commissioner? Consultation and discussions with commissioners exploring the motives behind doing a project. Where do you want to work, who do you want to work with and why?
- Community arts and arts organisations who co-create place based projects have a commitment to supporting local Artists in their area, offering mentorship opportunities for Artists from various backgrounds at different stages of their career or setting up open meetings to share their ideas and practices with staff.
- Addressing inequality in the arts, anti-racist work through the creation of working groups led by Artists and curators of colour (or other protected characteristics).



South Pennines Park Artist Residencies - James Mabbett. Photo © Bokegho.



3. Engaging with the Wider Sector

Whilst working on this research project, there have been a number of similar equity, diversity and inclusion projects exploring the barriers faced by Artists and producers from diverse backgrounds working in the visual arts and public art sector. I was invited to contribute to the following consultation sessions and forums:

IXIA Public Art Forum
(National Public Art Think Tank)
– September 2022

An online consultation forum for producers from diverse backgrounds about our experiences of working across the public art/ public realm field; our perceptions of public art and what changes are needed to support the next generation of practitioners. This was a great opportunity to reflect on some of the key findings so far from my research with Beam, but also to hear a range of perspectives from producers whose practice includes public art, Artists and commissioners, socially engaged arts practice, creative activism and co-creating arts projects with people. All producers were asked in advance their reasons for participating. Areas of interest included:

- The production of public art and the importance of community engagement and ethics
- The lack of access to site-specific public art work without enough provision made for disabled, or visually impaired visitors and Artists
- Rethinking the infrastructure of the arts and cultural sector

Following the consultation forums, IXIA will use this information along with data from a survey they conducted called 'Why Public Art, Why Now?' to create a strategy for IXIA's work going forwards that both supports the existing sector and also makes the sector more equitable.

Contemporary Visual Arts Network (CVAN) Fair & Equitable Meeting
– March 2022

The Fair and Equitable programme runs from 2021–2026 and aims to implement changes across the visual arts sector that facilitate the leadership and thriving of Artists and arts workers from underrepresented communities. The working group conversations will feed directly into the development of the Fair and Equitable programme, ensuring that the programme is informed by the lived experience of Artists and art workers who identify as part of Global Ethnic Majorities, disabled and neurodivergent, LGBTQI+ and working-class communities. The online meeting I attended in March specifically brought together producers, curators and Artists of colour to respond to and reflect on three key questions:

- What does a thriving visual arts scene look like for you and your peers?
- Are there challenges affecting Artists and art workers from marginalised and underrepresented communities that are particular to the visual arts sector? If so, what are they?
- What kind of support and development opportunities would enable you to thrive?

Primary Studios Nottingham
“You are the art, in public art”
– September 2022

I hosted an in person discussion about my research for Beam so far with an audience of ten that included socially engaged Artists, producers, curators and contemporary dancers. Outlined below are some of the main feedback points from the session:

- Public art as a genre has too much of a focus on creating a final object. Commissioners value the outcome of a public art project more than the process of working with people.
- The focus on diversifying the range of Artists in the public art sector is problematic, when it is the power structure (local authorities, arts organisations, producers, directors) that needs to be more inclusive and diverse. It’s not the Artist’s job.
- A diverse and inclusive workforce and decision makers creates diverse ideas and perspectives in the arts.



4. Research Phase Conclusions

Terminology

My research showed that many under-represented artists do not currently use or understand the term 'public art', which is a huge barrier for artists even considering applying for a public art commission. Artists and public art producers acknowledged that the term 'public art' is widely used by local authorities and the private sector. I found the most commonly used term by artists is 'art in the public realm' or just 'public realm'.

Artists describe their practice as either multidisciplinary, co-creating work with people in a place, or prefer not to be categorised preferring to list the different artforms they use (for example - my work includes, painting, film, digital).

Demystifying 'Public Art'

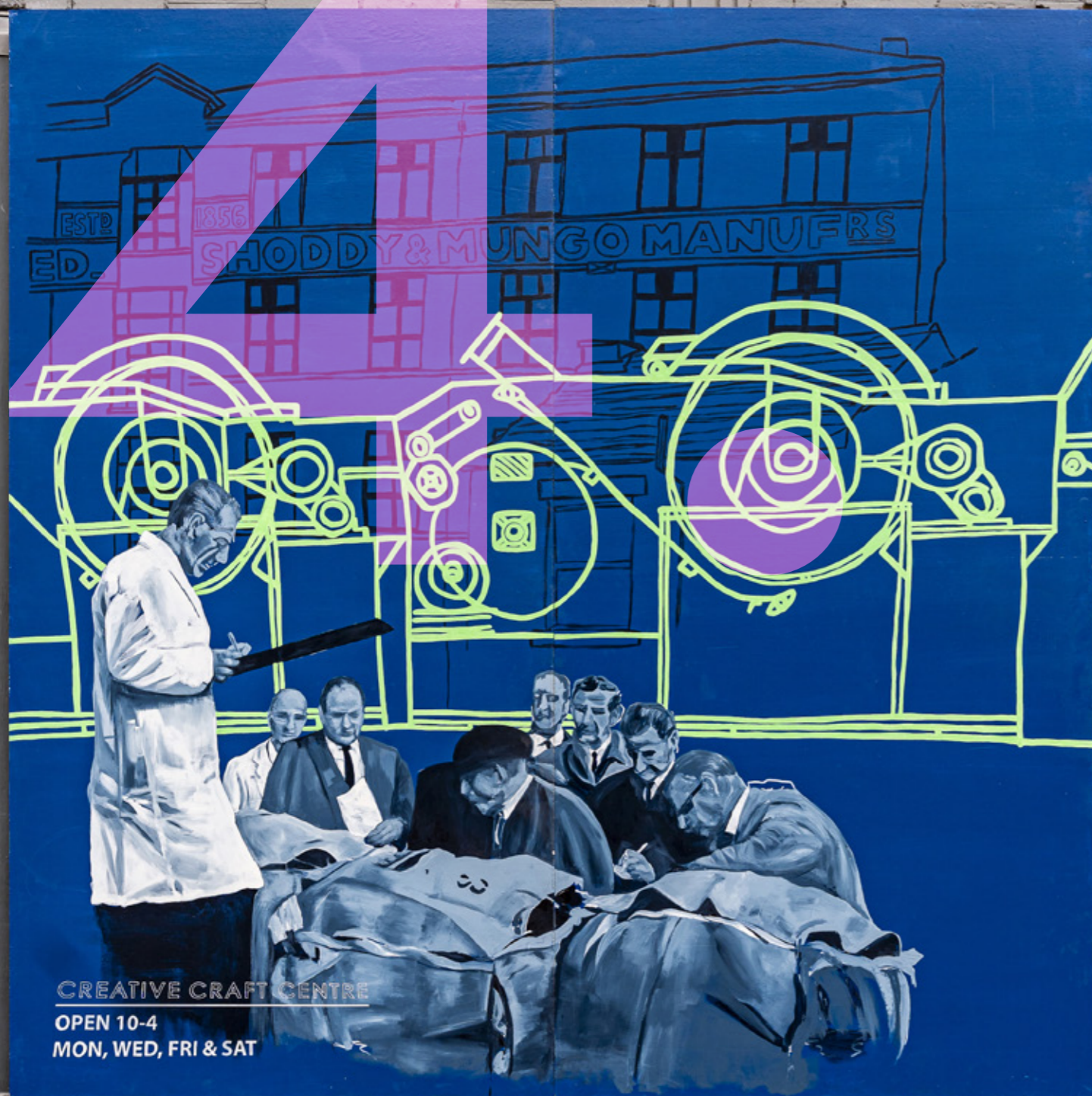
Demystifying what public art/ public realm work is, particularly for artists interested in working in the public and private sector is key; alongside clarity about the kinds of skills, knowledge and experience that are required and what to expect, particularly communicating your ideas to local authority officers and members, and other decision makers who are not from an arts background.

Accessible Application Process

The commission application process for artists needs to be simplified with less written work. Using simple plain language would encourage a wider range of under-represented artists to apply particularly those with dyslexia, ADHD etc. A range of accessible formats in which to submit your application such as using video and audio should be offered to all applicants across the public art sector. Arts organisations and public art specialists also need to be mindful of accessibility and allocate a budget for access needs and implement a diverse interview panel.

Further thoughts on application process include:

- Provide accessible alternative formats for applicants to access the brief e.g. video or audio available online.
- Have smaller sections in an application and a concise word count.
- Use clear and concise language and don't use overly complicated terminology.
- Use phrases such as multidisciplinary artists, artists working in the public realm or public spaces, artists working with people and place, visual artists - instead of public art.
- Implement a two stage application process - 1st stage is a brief expression of interest, cover letter and type submission with CV of experience. Short list applicants to the 2nd stage to prepare a more detailed application/ proposal.



Engaging Communities

Artists delivering public realm projects for local authorities need to be commissioned earlier in the process to develop the work in consultation with communities and local residents to build trust, ensuring that they are actively involved in decision making about the work.

Engaging under-represented Artists

The public art sector needs to adopt a more targeted approach to engage and support under-represented Artists working in or interested in applying for public realm projects. The emerging actions that the sector is taking to address this includes:

- Arts organisations developing public realm community arts projects in partnership with diverse grass roots arts organisations.
- Establishing advisory groups led by and for Artists and producers of colour.
- Producers networking.
- Promoting opportunities directly to Artist-led spaces, and collectives in their area.

Local Authority Approach

There is a need to look at how local authorities commission public art, having allocated funding for a piece of public art then commissioning Artists to deliver work with a fixed outcome. A more effective and ethical way of working (ideally) would be for council representatives to meet with community organisations already working with arts organisations and explore what they actually want. This would also encourage local Artists from diverse backgrounds to apply for public realm work.

Public art producers could facilitate an advisory and mentoring session with under-represented Artists and local authorities. This would enable the Public Sector to have a greater understanding of how to work with Artists, be realistic about their role and to manage expectations. This would also help broaden commissioners' perspective in terms of the broader range of Artists' practices.

Supporting Artist Development

Early career Artists from working class backgrounds need paid mentoring opportunities with established public realm Artists to develop their skill sets and experience. Established Artists working on a public art commission should be paid to mentor early or mid career Artists with protected characteristics wanting to work in the sector.

There is an appetite for a peer-led Artist group to support each other in developing their work in the public realm.



South Pennines Park Artist Residency by Emma Long. Photo © Studio Bokehgo.

5. Towards a Diverse Artists Development Programme

Gathering all the feedback and recommendations compiled through my research I have considered content for an Artist support programme based on Artist needs.

Artists want to know more about:

- Everything you need to know as an Artist interested in creating work in the public realm - hearing from experienced Artists.
- Demystifying the commissioning process.
- How to present yourself and ideas to clients/ commissioners in the public or commercial sector who are not from an arts background.
- The role of the producer - how they can support and be an advocate for Artists working in the public realm, particularly in the public and private sector, mentoring and the commissioning process.
- Understanding the various roles involved e.g. working with structural engineers, fabricators, awareness of supply chain issues, understanding of materials, planning permission, engineering, health & safety, realistically how long a project may take.
- Community/ public engagement is essential, consulting with local communities, co-creating work with communities, consultation with local residents.
- What's the legacy of a public art/ public realm piece and how much agency do local people have? Do they actually want it?
- Provide advice for Artists about fundraising from Arts Council England and other sources.
- Support for Artists' mental health and wellbeing.

Also to consider:

- Opportunities for Artists and Local Authority commissioners to build a greater understanding of Artists practice and the expectations from local authorities.
- Potential to engage Artists who contributed to this report to discuss the creation of an Artists support network, facilitated by Beam.
- It is recommended to re-engage the Artists and organisations who have contributed to this research to act as partners for a future Artist support programme.

Further Reading

- Fostering Equity in the Visual Arts Sector, CVAN, written by Dr Cecilia Wee and Veionella Spaine
- “It’s about handing over power” commissioned by Art Fund, written by Culture& and Museum X
- A Knowledge Exchange Report on Anti-Racism and Equity in the Visual Arts for CVAN London and INIVA, written by Dr Jack Ky Tan
- Headline findings from online consultation forums September 2022 by ixia : Public Art Think Tank
- Why Public Art? Why Now? Re-thinking Art and the Public Realm Survey 2022-23 by ixia



About the Author

Beam appointed **Boseda Olawoye**, a Nottingham based independent Creative Engagement Manager, in the role of Diverse Artist Network Coordinator to carry out this research over a period of 9 months.

Her work explores race, identity, place and social justice issues. She has twenty years experience working in the visual arts sector locally, nationally and internationally.

About Beam

Beam is a cultural development organisation working across the North of England, their inclusive approach champions, celebrates and engages Artists and communities to shape and animate thriving places.

Credits

Thank you to all of the Artists and producers from the arts and public arts organisations and consultancies for participating in these interviews and for sharing such honest feedback and insights.

Research, interviews and report by Boseda Olawoye, Diverse Artists Network Co-ordinator.

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