






Opening Up, Moving In, Moving On

-  POROSITY
-  FLUX
-  COLLABORATION
-  COMMUNALITY
-  EXPERIMENTATION



Conference Report
by Kat Evans, Jo Ayre
and Helen Morgan

A half day event exploring the role of shared studios
within professional practice



Potbank Café Conference
Room, Spode Works,
Stoke-on-Trent
27th October 2017

© 2018, Clay Comrades

Published March 2018, Stoke-on-Trent

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution
4.0 International License.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS 1

British Ceramics Biennial	1
Factory	1
Clay Comrades	1
Photography and Artwork	1

FOREWORD 2

Jo Ayre, British Ceramics Biennial	2
------------------------------------	---

INTRODUCTION 3

Kat Evans, Clay Comrade	3
-------------------------	---

OPENING UP 5

Jo Ayre, British Ceramics Biennial	5
Oliver Marlow, Studio Tilt	8
Signe Bailey, Den Danske Keramikfabrik	9

MOVING IN 11

Why	11
Where	12
Who	13
How	14

MOVING ON 15

Together	15
Shared Practice and Professional Studios, Kat Evans	15
End Note, Jo Ayre	17

REFERENCES 18

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

BRITISH CERAMICS BIENNIAL

The British Ceramics Biennial (BCB) launched in 2009 with a 6-week festival celebrating and showcasing contemporary ceramics from across the world.

Set in Stoke-on-Trent - the heart of the UK ceramics industry - the festival took place in established venues and non-traditional spaces across the city. Opening Up, Moving In, Moving On took place during the fifth British Ceramics Biennial in 2017.

The British Ceramics Biennial festival is now established as the UK's premiere ceramics event. The six week biennial festival is underpinned by a year round activity of artists' commissions, residencies, and an expanding community and education engagement programme.

www.britishceramicsbiennial.com

FACTORY

The Opening Up, Moving In, Moving On event was supported by Factory, Staffordshire's Creative Industries Development Programme and part funded by the European Regional Development Fund's England Operational Programme 2014 - 20.

Factory offers a personal approach to growing your business, delivered through a series of bespoke support activities including: one to one business advice & guidance, business development workshops, sector driven events, networking opportunities, experienced mentors, tradeshow exposure and competitive market intelligence to help drive your business forward.

www.staffordshirechambers.co.uk/business-support/factory

CLAY COMRADES

On Mondays and Thursdays, the British Ceramics Biennial's studio at Spode Works becomes an Open Studio. Operating on a membership basis, over 30 adults with experience of working with clay to experiment, create new work and collaborate with their peers. Members of the Open Studio are informally referred to as the Clay Comrades.

The Opening Up, Moving In, Moving On event was hosted by the Clay Comrades. Discussions were facilitated by Sue Blatherwick, Helen Morgan, Kim Graham and Leone Amber.

www.claycomrades.co.uk

PHOTOGRAPHY & ARTWORK

Event photography by Darren Washington - a commercial photographer based in Stoke-on-Trent. Darren owns One One Six, a photography studio and mixed-media gallery.

www.gallery116.org/darren-washington/

Illustrations by Rebecca Davies - an artist working within a participatory practice through illustration, performance and events.

www.rebecca-davies.tumblr.com

Report layout and design by Helen Morgan - a Clay Comrade.

www.helenmorgan.co.uk

FOREWORD

JO AYRE, BRITISH CERAMICS BIENNIAL

The British Ceramics Biennial is a festival that celebrates experimentation, risk-taking and ambition within the expanded field of ceramic practice. The success of the festival rests significantly not only upon the quality of its artistic programme, but also on its ability to attract wider audiences to not only appreciate the artwork exhibited, but to engage with the material of clay in a meaningful way. The community and education engagement programme leads the way with this work, operating a year-round programme and directly impacting upon the festival every two years. The studio is crucial to this programme as it provides a base which allows the organisation to focus more keenly on the facilitation of the creation of work for both the artistic programme and engagement programme, whilst providing a direct conversation between the two. Whether it be through sowing the seed of interest through placing artists in schools; offering and highlighting opportunities for professional development for emerging artists such as residencies, exhibitions or work placements; or providing support for established artists to explore the medium of clay. One of the British Ceramics Biennial's key aims is to help make Stoke-on-Trent an active centre, fostering and giving opportunity for the generation of ideas for new, creative ceramic innovation.

The role that studios have to play is pivotal in the creation of new works and the development of an environment of collaboration and support. The shared studio can be a hive of industrious activity, providing momentum and encouragement to makers at all stages. The title of this conference sought to explore the journey of both studio space and studio member;



- **Opening Up** - how and why does a studio come into existence?
- **Moving In** - who uses the studio space and how?
- **Moving On** - how does both the studio space itself evolve and how does an artists practice develop?

There are many different paths via which a studio may come into existence; charity-led, artist-run or as a business enterprise. The studio management may then follow one of any number of routes, with strategic and operational management approaches playing a role to a greater or lesser extent. Members may be directly involved, not only within the day-to-day management of a space, but with a view to the overall ethos and ambitions of the studio through active decision-making and shared governance. This conference sought to explore the multifarious methods used in establishing and maintaining a shared studio. A chance to develop a greater understanding of successes and challenges within the sector and to strengthen the relationships within the wider community of shared ceramic studios.

INTRODUCTION

KAT EVANS, CLAY COMRADE

The Opening Up, Moving In, Moving On event took place on the 27th October during the fifth British Ceramics Biennial (BCB) in Stoke-on-Trent and aimed to explore the relationship between shared studios and professional practice. The event was prompted by the development of the BCB's own Shared Studio space but was set against a background of sustained growth in makerspaces and communal studios where artists and makers share equipment, skills and inspiration. The 50 attendees represented artists, makers, shared studio founders, managers and researchers from across the UK.

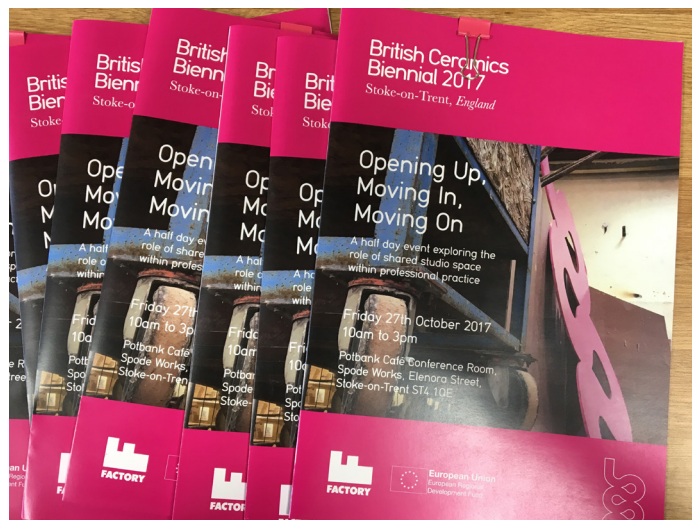
In Mapping Artists' Professional Development Programmes in the UK: Knowledge and Skills (2015), Gordon-Nesbitt helpfully differentiates between two strands of support for professional practice. First, support which might be understood as practice-based, helping artists' core ability to produce good, creative work. Second, what Gordon-Nesbitt defines as "knowledge/skills-focused", supporting the broader skills that can help an artist make a living: marketing and promotion, accessing and managing different income streams. The first strand can be supported by access to resources, but also by the critical discourse that arises during artist residencies and exhibition commissions. In recent years, many artist development programmes appear to be designed to focus on the second strand. It would be easy to put these two strands in opposition to each other, the second seems narrowly pecuniary, whilst the former, which necessarily involves experimentation and risk-taking, feels more valid as a genuine contribution to supporting artists to make transformative leaps in their practice. However, as Gordon-Nesbitt points out, context is paramount. In an artist-led environment, both practice-based and knowledge/skills-focused guidance received from other artists can be highly valued and create solidarity across the sector.



The BCB Shared Studio, image by Kim Graham, Clay Comrade

What role can a Shared Studio have in supporting these strands of professional practice? The motivation for using a Shared Studio may be purely pragmatic: affordable and flexible space to work; access to equipment; specialist skills and knowledge. But using these spaces is fundamentally different from having an individual studio. As in formal education, in a shared studio we work alongside our peers; have informal opportunities to verbalise thoughts and receive feedback; we have access to sources of inspiration; and networks that tell us about opportunities. Bringing together artists with diverse backgrounds and motivations, studio members can experience challenges and frustrations with the (mis)use of the shared space, materials and tools. But members can also meet, and form friendships with people that they would be unlikely to interact with in their ordinary lives. A shared interest in materials and process can provide the language and means to overcome social, linguistic and economic differences between different studio members from different backgrounds. Equally, artists at the beginning of their career can meet and learn from highly successful artists using the space temporarily during a residency or in preparation for an exhibition.

Being part of something greater than the individual is also what leads to one of the most exciting aspects of the shared studio. Collaborative practice, group exhibitions and commissions are what make a shared studio collective “more than the sum of its parts”. These opportunities can take individual artists outside of their comfort zone, sharing risk across a group and allowing the collective to carry out work that no single artist could have conceived of, or undertaken, by themselves.



Shared studios can create opportunities for peer-to-peer learning and, with some nurturing and encouragement, can be breeding grounds for the solidarity and support that will enable the artists, and the sector which depends on them, to survive in times of austerity, building enduring relationships and even movements that embed mutuality in their *modus operandi*.

In setting the context for the event, Jo Ayre (BCB Studio Manager) describes how the BCB's studio has been the stage for all of these interactions, and more. Oliver Marlow from Studio Tilt sets out the importance of engaging and listening to communities and future studio users when developing new co-working spaces. He asks what role artists might have in re-envisaging a space, its connection with a specific geographical place, and the relationships that are built in and around it. Signe Bailey of Den Danske Keramikfabrik gives an account of how a values-based collaboration, not without its own challenges and frustrations, has led to the achievement of a shared dream, allowing the individuals to create livelihoods using their own skills and artistic practice. During the Opening Up, Moving In, Moving On event, their presentations acted as a catalyst to open discussions on the Why, Where, Who and How of Shared Studios and Professional Practice. Highlights from these discussions are set out below, followed by a conclusion that summarises next steps and areas for further investigation and action.

OPENING UP

JO AYRE, BRITISH CERAMICS BIENNIAL

www.britishceramicsbiennial.com

In 2015, I became the studio manager for the British Ceramics Biennial. This appointment coincided with my relocation back to North Staffordshire following a decade of living and working in London. I had grown up on the immediate outskirts of Stoke-on-Trent and began my early career working at both Wedgwood Visitor Centre and Gladstone Pottery Museum. My own experience of shared studios at this point was setting up with fellow graduates from the RCA, and some years prior to this, a short spell of sharing with Rita Floyd, a bone china flower maker, in Longton, Stoke-on-Trent. I was excited about being given the guardianship of what was, at the time, a ramshackle, cold, abandoned series of rooms within the now-closed Spode factory. Excited, and a little daunted; the first time a friend came to see the space he uttered the prognosis *'It'll be great, with a lot of hard work.'*

The role of the studio at this time was predominantly as a resource to support the education and engagement programme, providing facilities and opportunity for people to work in a live workshop environment, as well as creating products connected with the BCB festival.



Jo in the Studio, image by Stephanie Rushton, Photographer

My first job was to support high profile British artist Bruce McLean with the making of a large number of works for the 2015 festival. As that festival passed, I spent a lot of time with visitors, volunteers and local artists. It became clear that opportunities for makers to have access to the appropriate facilities had become a rarity within the city.

I was aware of the burgeoning provision of shared/open access ceramics studios within London, such as Turning Earth and Kiln Rooms, and I felt that there could be (as setting would necessarily dictate) an alternative approach to a similar set-up within Stoke-on-Trent. I began with a series of informal courses in the early months of 2016 (the least hospitable time of year to welcome visitors into an unheated ex-industrial space). These proved to be popular and after numerous conversations it became clear that there was an interest in a more open provision of the studio. In May, following a significant tidy-up and re-organisation of the space, we opened the doors on a Thursday from 1 - 8.30pm to local makers. Instantly popular and successful, this open access has continued since then, necessitating the addition of another day in 2017. The courses that had been provided, shifted too. Through a partnership with Stoke-on-Trent City Council, we were able to begin a series of beginners and intermediate ceramics courses at an accessible price point for all who were interested in the local area.

Other projects that have taken place within the studio have sought to widen participation in creative activity.

These include *Clay Together*, a monthly drop-in session which encourages families and friends to explore making side-by-side and *World in One City* a project run alongside members of Burslem Jubilee, a support group for Refugees and Asylum Seekers.



The Jubilee Group in the BCB Shared Studio

One of the real triumphs of the studio has been the collaboration between members. This has grown out of a shared enthusiasm not only for material and process but for place (Spode Works and Stoke-on-Trent) and community. The motivation and energy required for the initial battle with the cold, pigeons and cat pee, during the first few weeks, has been sustained throughout the past two years and shows no signs of abating. In fact, the goodwill, generosity and creativity of those involved with the studio, has grown emphatically, and provides clear evidence of the drive and determination to develop the studio further and to have a positive impact upon the quality and breadth of cultural activity within the city. Members have been involved with sharing their enthusiasm and expertise all over the city, supporting the city's bid to be City of Culture and participating in other regional cultural events. Many of the members have played a crucial role in volunteering during the BCB festival. The ambition and confidence of the group has grown, partly thanks to the acclaim received for their collaborative work, but most importantly, through the satisfaction felt by the members involved.



The Clay Comrades at "Lost Gardens of Stoke" commission

The studio has grown and evolved as a reflection of the users of the space. At this moment in time, BCB are exploring ways in which to develop their studio provision from the current scenario, which feels at times like a permitted 'squatting' to a more permanent solution, we hope within the Spode site. The agency of the members is a rich resource, and offers integrity and depth to the collaborative development of this 'new' space. The relationships developed around the existing studio have a special quality and it is essential that this is reflected through more than tokenistic consultation, that expansion grows genuinely out of the solid foundations established so far. Stoke-on-Trent, undoubtedly, is somewhere with a great deal to offer to those working with clay. We have aspirations to improve our international residency opportunities, as well as providing somewhere to showcase local heritage skills, whilst also, most importantly, providing an intersection between different approaches to material exploration.

When thinking about the staging of this event, the following questions were key areas that motivated its conception:

- How do we develop our studio further?
- How can we support new makers?
- How can we help makers who would like to transition into professional practice?
- How do we reflect our rich heritage?
- How do we keep our skills alive?

"Reconfiguration is more experimental in outlook and more informal in procedure; fixing an old machine can lead, when people play around with it, to transforming the machine's purpose as well as its functioning; so too, repairing broken social relations can become open-ended, especially if pursued informally."

Richard Sennett (2013)



The British Ceramics Biennial Open Studio and the Clay Comrades

Studio TILT's approach begins by talking and listening to communities, but quickly moves into a deeper interaction based on doing things together. To develop a shared understanding of issues relating to heritage and identity, it is crucial to get beneath a surface understanding of place. Whilst working alongside each other, our tacit knowledge and latent knowledge can be made visible. This 'doing' can be achieved through anything from making food to making furniture.

Marlow described how an empty or under-occupied space can be used as a catalyst in this codesign process. In Studio TILT's work with Derby Museums an under used space was repurposed and filled with digital and analogue tools for the local community to use, developing skills and ambitions in the process. From there the actual Museum itself was designed and made. This kind of value generation is in contrast to the dominant Real Estate model whereby the value of a space can be only measured financially.



The Silk Mill Museum, Derby

This approach leads to developments based on profit - how much potential residents or businesses will pay for the spaces and services on offer.

Artists and communities can work differently, moving into a space and working in a way that builds social value through the very act of collaboration. This value, which can be hard to quantify financially in the first place, can build resilience, developing skills and place based confidence. Ironically these kind of processes often happen organically in underused and undesirable areas where artists build these communities, before the development of identity and place alongside leads to financial growth, as others recognise and desire the results of their work.



Marlow concluded by asking what role artists can and do play in these processes. The skills needed for an artist's own creative practice and those required for teaching, training and community action are often different.

Since artists left the garret, as it were, well over 20 years ago, there has been a professionalisation of artistic practice and an understanding that artists create value in their ability to offer new perspectives, bring meaning and elevate both objects and space beyond the material and the concrete.

Artists can envisage different futures and tell different stories, helping innovate how communities, cities and organisations think about themselves.

Bailey described how in 2014, a group of ceramic designers and makers were brought together by their shared frustrations. Despite designing successful products and managing small batch processes, they were unable to scale up or respond to larger commissions due to lack of space and the responsibilities and risks associated with hiring employees. Some of the designer-makers had worked with factories in the Far East, but they had suffered setbacks including inaccurate colour matching, concerns about working conditions, high transportation costs, and counterfeiting. The designers and makers had embarked on their careers in ceramics due to a love of making, but it was this aspect of the process that they were outsourcing.

The last ceramics factory in Denmark had closed two years before. High wages meant it was not affordable to produce in the country. Nonetheless, the group were ambitious and embarked on a journey to set up a new ceramics factory as a collective.

Bornholm Island, in the Baltic Sea, was identified as a possible location. Bornholm has a School of Design (part of the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts), providing a source of recent graduates to work with. Located four hours from Copenhagen, a new enterprise on the island could attract European Union funding. It also has the right environmental conditions to use wind power as a source of energy. Due to its history of craft production, the name Bornholm has connotations of quality. The group identified a retired factory manager, living on Bornholm, with knowledge of larger batch production and lured him out of retirement. At an initial meeting with the local council and the employment office, the group met 40 people and received significant support for their plans. A building was identified, an old furniture factory that had, at some time in its history, been used for ceramic production.



At this point, 19 people were in the group. They were idealistic people and decided to take the plunge. Using a co-operative model with 19 co-owners ensured capacity to collaborate on large projects, it also meant that there were enough people to cover maternity, paternity and sick leave. Crucially, the Cooperative model would ensure good physical working conditions, avoiding health conditions such as potters' rot and arthritis. Each member put in start-up capital of €5,000. People who had previously been competitors became collaborators. The group shared connections and knowledge: glaze recipes, blacksmith uncles and lawyer aunts.



Bailey was honest in her description of Den Danske Keramikfabrik's journey. This has not been straightforward and many lessons have been learnt along the way. With limited experience of mass production, orders need to be limited edition and high value e.g. co-branded products with museums. At first, there were issues with firing quality and the space has been re-organised many times to make it more productive. The co-operative model initially led to lengthy meetings. As with models of production, decision-making models also need reviewing and reworking to ensure they are fit for purpose. However, their reputation with clients and the nomination for a Design Award in 2017 has provided external recognition for their values and skills. Importantly, the co-owners of Den Danske Keramikfabrik are doing something together that they could not do alone: maintaining ceramics production in Denmark.



MOVING IN

Following presentations by the three speakers, break out groups discussed the Why, Where, Who and How of shared studios.

Individuals in each group asked their own questions. These valuable enquiries have been recorded as prompts for further discussion and research. Beneath these questions, a short summary of the wide-ranging discussion has been recorded.



WHY

- Why do people use shared studio spaces?
- Why do organisations set up shared studios?
- How can shared studios impact on individuals, the sector, community?
- Is it better to have a mission (to know why you are setting up) or organic growth that responds to demand?
- How do you maintain informality whilst moving forward?
- How can you manage a space that is relevant in the present but meets future needs?

Artists use open studios to share knowledge, risk, cost, and specialist skills. Motivation can arise from need, as individual studios are expensive and can require a long term commitment. Shared studios offer a flexible resource to overcome these barriers. People are also drawn to shared studios from a desire to come together in person, not in a virtual space, through a love of materials and processes, and a desire to experiment, and to meet others.

Organisations set up shared studios to support artist development and build capacity in the sector through providing space for visiting artists or short term residencies. At a different level, they are also responding to cuts in adult education provision and discipline-specific undergraduate degrees. Organisations without significant grant income may also set up studios for commercial reasons: to generate income through delivering courses, membership payments, and delivering master classes.

An informal or multi-use studio space can form part of the ecology of a city such as Stoke-on-Trent. Existing beyond the formality of accreditation and Individual Learning Plans, it can bring people together, nurturing talent, skills and thought and creating a physical space where creativity can be enacted and shared. Whilst it can be difficult to quantify or evaluate these outcomes without in-depth longitudinal studies, this informality undoubtedly leads to exciting collaborations and progression in artistic practice.

The physical design of a space inevitably influences what happens within in it. Studio design can create opportunities for interaction or spaces for quiet making, equally the

space itself is likely to influence the ethos of those who use it. In order to maintain a functioning space as its users change and develop, a significant investment of time and energy is required to establish shared values, a community ethos or 'cultural glue' that creates and values experimentation, and can encourage 'collisions' between beginners and international artists. "Expecting the unexpected" is ambitious, but should be a goal.

Without a pre-established and articulated mission, tensions can arise between business drivers and community drivers, or between personal motivations and the collective. However, these very tensions can be an additional source of creativity allowing the venture to move forwards in its understanding of its potential and purpose.

WHERE

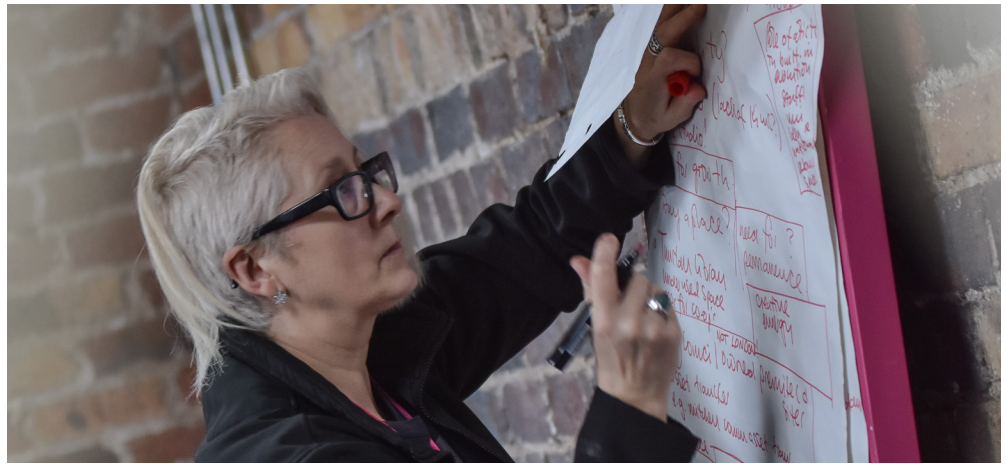
- What issues do artists face working in different geographical locations?
- What solutions are there to finding a space that has sufficient flexibility to manage change with sufficient stability to mitigate the risk of upfront investment?
- Is place-making a consideration?
- How does the existing identity of a place impact on the demand and interest in studio spaces?

Context necessarily informs the model of studio space that is set up. Diverse examples such as Craft Central and Turning Earth in London, East Street Arts in Leeds, and the Tunstall Library studios in Stoke-on-Trent demonstrate various approaches to the conundrum of achieving a sufficiently long lease to provide stability for artists, whilst maintaining the flexibility necessary to manage an organisation's finances during periods of change. This change appears to be inevitable, as the users and staff managing a space will have different needs and motivations, buildings that present as affordable studio spaces are often located in areas that are in flux. The challenge facing studio managers is determining to what extent the need for a space will remain in years to come.

In its central London location, Craft Central has a 20-year lease, reducing immediate uncertainty and betting on the ongoing relevance of its existence. In other locations, as local authorities' budgets and services are cut, opportunities arise for asset transfer or peppercorn rents for the 'meanwhile use' of spaces in transition. However, this lack of stability is not always appropriate for artistic practice that involves significant investment in a space and equipment such as the installation of kilns. Historic buildings can attract grant funding and/or investment but listings or other restrictions may present additional challenges in creating a functional studio space.

Staffordshire University's plans for a National Ceramics Centre in Stoke-on-Trent seeks to build on the city's existing assets. The identity of the Potteries as the 'World Capital of Ceramics' cannot be ignored when approaching the question of studios and skills in Stoke-on-Trent. Both are in abundant supply but require investment to activate in a way that benefits residents and the sector alike.

Finally, rurality presents its own challenges. Shared studio spaces would seem to present a solution to artists' isolation but finding a financially viable model is challenging when travelling distances are factored in.



WHO

- Who is the studio for? How does it affect the local community?
- Should access always be open?
- How do you promote a studio?
- How can you get in new people rather than recurring practitioners?
- How can you keep everyone happy?

A shared studio could be used by beginners, people at an advanced place in their career or people returning to their practice after a break. These people may represent different 'communities of interest' but inside the studio can become a community in their own right. This new community has the potential to positively impact upon the local community, becoming a resource that others can draw on.

As studios become more established, experienced studio members can take on roles and responsibilities for further developing and managing the space.

New studio members can be recruited by running classes or short workshops, promoting the studio through the local authority, schools and heritage organisations, approaching art groups, community groups and other studios in the area, or by targeted outreach work e.g. weekly open access to young people. The networks of existing studio members are one of the best ways to promote the studio to new members.

Keeping everyone happy is a challenge when resources are shared and interests, like clay bodies, they are not always fully compatible. Again, delegating the management of the space to its users can help mitigate these tensions. However, in a collective model, or in a studio with an informal arrangement, it is not always transparent who sets the parameters or rules. There is no easy answer to the question of managing membership, for example, if a particular member's behaviour negatively impacts on other users.





HOW

- How do you strike a balance between being organised and creative?
- How do you manage the use of materials and equipment?
- How should health and safety issues be managed?
- How can a studio be sustained and how can income be generated?

Identifying and learning from successful models of shared studios can support new studios to address many of the questions above. Developing and utilising strong online communities of practice, where studio managers can ask for help will also support learning from prior experience. Establishing a good team, with both technical and business skills, is crucial in making a studio sustainable. Possible income streams including members' fees (an online booking system can streamline this), groups paying to use the space, selling work, teaching private classes or those subsidised by the local authority. Identifying a studio's assets (technical expertise, physical space, equipment), can be a good starting point for identifying further income generation strategies.

Proactively supporting professional practice in a Shared Studio space can be carried out through individual mentoring or structured programmes of support.



MOVING ON

TOGETHER

The Opening Up, Moving In, Moving On event concluded with a summary of discussions and proposed next steps from the Why, Where, Who, How subgroups. There was agreement on the benefits of maintaining a dialogue between different shared studio spaces across the UK. Just as artists within each Shared Studio had found strength in collaboration, continued communication amongst emerging and established spaces could lead to building relationships and the sharing of expertise through an accessible directory of Shared Studios, an informal online networking space or further face-to-face events.

SHARED PRACTICE AND PROFESSIONAL STUDIOS, KAT EVANS

"It is better to live in a state of impermanence than in one of finality"

Bachelard (1994)

As we have seen, at an early point in an artist's career, shared studios can provide flexible and affordable access to space and equipment. Encounters between artists at the apex of their practice and emerging artists can inspire and support the development of an individual's practice. In artist-led organisations and spaces these interactions are characterised by solidarity, and can lead to an authentic and disinterested exchange of skills. Moving beyond individual practice, shared studios inevitably lead to opportunities for collaboration and moreover, shared practice.



The Clay Comrades and the public engaging at "Lost Gardens of Stoke" commission

What does it mean to be a shared studio that intentionally supports artistic development and excellence within the sector, including excellence in collaborative artistic practice? How could that space provide the longer-term support that really benefits artists? What should that space look and feel like, and how does its design encourage interaction and cooperation? In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard's words serve us as inspiration when designing co-working spaces. Although previous experiences will inform us, the spaces of our youth should not limit our ambition. The flux that characterises a shared studio creates space and freedom for the experimentation and risk-taking that helps individuals and collectives to develop better work and bolder dreams.

And what of the world beyond our studios? Oliver Marlow asks what role artists can play in processes of change. As ceramic artists, our practice is based on a knowledge of processes that can transform an everyday material from one state to another. This is about skill. But more than this, it is about belief and imagination. In changing a cold, empty and underused space to a hub of collective activity and debate, we are transforming more than a place. There is a shift in ambition, in capacity and vision. As Signe Bailey's account makes evident, the level of personal and/or financial investment required to bring about significant shifts can often only be undertaken collectively. In the case of Den Danske Keramikfabrik, a co-operative model enabled individual members to fulfil their own potential, but also brought ceramic production back to Denmark. By working together and becoming a recognisable entity that is bigger than the individuals it consists of, collectives can become a recognisable resource for others - their combined energies, skills and example can be employed in partnership with other agencies or groups.

By their nature, shared studios are porous: artists come and go, alternative firings may take place in the grounds, and in the local community. This porosity subverts the idea that the studio is a space with boundaries, with an inside and outside. Equally, through sharing tools, equipment and space, the notion of ownership is subverted. In her description of the British Ceramics Biennial's Shared Studio, Jo Ayre references Richard Sennett *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures & Politics of Cooperation* (2012). As demonstrated by the questions arising in the group discussions, shared studios undoubtedly foster our ability to manage difference and discord. The shared love of materials and process are almost always the best tools to overcome tensions. The particular characteristics of a shared studio can provide a 'rehearsal' or action-research place for artistic development and artistic collaboration but can also offer a testing ground for broader social relationships characterised by cooperation.



Following the conference, and in recognition of the success to date of the BCB Shared Studio programme and the work of the BCB Studio Manager, the BCB will take forward the idea of the current squatted studio to the realisation of a shared studio space with greater security and resources that facilitates the continued output of possibilities.

Embedded within the BCB four year business plan (2018-2022), is a commitment to continuing to work with Stoke-on-Trent City Council around the development of 'Building 7', a self-contained building within the Spode Works site. BCB are actively seeking to secure the building and to refurbish it as a permanent base for its activities as a centre for engagement, for artist research and for project work at local, national and international levels, as a base for collaborations and exchanges. This will require careful management, but, if achieved, will also provide BCB with an asset from which to devise projects, drive audiences and secure sustainable income.

As part of this journey, we plan to continue the expanded discussion, evident within this event and report, with further opportunities to share experiences and build supportive networks both nationally and internationally.



REFERENCES

Bachelard, G. (1994) *The Poetics of Space*. Translated by Jolas, M. 2nd Edn. Boston: Beacon Press

Dunne, K. et al. (2014) *Creating Artists' Workspace*. London: GLA. [Online] Available: https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/gla_caw_140911_web.pdf [Accessed: Nov 2017]

Gordon-Nesbitt, R. (2015) *Mapping Artists' Professional Development Programmes in the UK: Knowledge and Skills*. London: Chisenhale Gallery. [Online] Available: http://chisenhale.org.uk/downloads/mapping_artists-web.pdf [Accessed: Nov 2017]

Groves, K. and Marlow, O. (2016) *Spaces for Innovation. The Design and Science of Inspiring Environments*. Amsterdam: Frame Publishers

Sennet, R. (2012) *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation*. New Haven: Yale University Press



www.claycomrades.co.uk

