

Artists Working in Communities

What is Community Art?

Community art is a concept that developed from the post-war notion of Cultural Democracy. According to the Tate website "Cultural democracy seeks to democratise culture in order to bring about an awareness and appreciation of art to as wide a section of society as possible; and to break down the boundaries between high and low culture in order to make art accessible to a wider audience"

The key principles of Cultural Democracy aim to promote inclusion and diversity in the arts world, bridging the gap between ordinary people and encouraging active participation through equitable access to cultural resources.

How do we meaningfully connect via culture?

"Culture ... is an all-encompassing idea: it contains the arts, politics, the built environment, and the entire array of voluntary activities that are part of human life. If we're to act effectively in the world, we have to understand the interrelatedness of all aspects of culture, rather than succumbing to the view that each aspect is a specialized enclave, best left to experts. In short, culture must be seen as a public interest." - Arlene Goldbard and Don Adams authors of *"Cultural Policy and Cultural Democracy,"* 1990

Cultural Democracy aims to counteract the lasting effects of imperialism and the damage it can cause to diverse communities. It rejects the idea of an “official culture”, acknowledging that many cultures can and should co-exist and none should be able to dominate.

When artists work within communities, they are hearing the voices of those who might often feel invisible. Not only does this mean that diverse cultures can be understood and protected, but it also encourages participation.

It is important that artists and arts organisations make their resources available to minority groups to ensure no cultural erasure or dominance is able to happen.

Socially Engaged Practice

Artists have a responsibility to use their platforms to provide a voice to groups that are less able to speak out. The idea of Socially Engaged Practice is to involve people and communities in debate, working alongside them to accurately describe their experiences. Socially Engaged Practice can be a form of activism, using art as a tool to raise awareness of political issues and encourage participation. Collaborating with residents is a vital step towards important social change and improvements.

Examples of Socially Engaged Practice

A Simple Act of Wonder falls into this category because Walter & Zoniel spent time in the communities in Moulsecoomb and Bevendean that they hope to represent, learning about the

people that live there. The project provides a voice to these people and accurately tells their stories, challenging previous stereotypes and assumptions about the area.

Fabrica has a history of socially engaged artwork. The gallery has always maintained an ethos of inclusivity and aims to provide opportunities to socialise, engage and create to marginalised groups through its learning and educational programmes. This summer, *Quiet Revelations* has aimed to create a portrait of our present times, gathering insights and contributions from the public. The idea is to emphasise the importance of individual experiences and responses to the ongoing Covid-19 crisis, noting; “it’s these quiet revelations, and not the big predictions, that we’ll take forward into our lives on the other side of all this”.

Sources:

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tate.org.uk

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