

# THE CODE

of practice  
for the  
visual arts

FOR

ORGANISATIONS

## CREDITS

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## INTRODUCTION

The Code of Practice for the Visual Arts was researched and written in 2003 by Lee Corner and was informed by the contemporary cultural and economic climate for visual artists and their practice, reflecting collaborative approaches and interdisciplinarity.

It was informed by a Strategic Advisory Group including Arts Council England Visual Arts Officer Sara Bowler, artist and consultant Jason E Bowman, Artquest Programme Manager Stephen Beddoe, artist and curator Eddie Chambers, Kate Hainsworth and Kay Pallister from Axis, Cornerhouse Visual Arts Programmer Kathy Rae Huffman, Business Design Centre Development Manager Sarah Lee, University of Wolverhampton Associate Dean Antonia Payne and BALTIC Education and Public Programme Manager Emma Thomas.

The research was supported by the National Lottery through Arts Council England in 2003. a-n The Artists Information is committed to maintaining awareness of good practices in the visual arts through promotion of the code and associated publications to artists and arts employers.

Lee Corner has worked in the creative and cultural sectors for many years, specialising in organisational development and human resource management. Over the recent period, she has devised training and professional development programmes that she now runs for individual artists and groups across the UK. She researched and wrote the first Code of Practice for the Visual Arts as a commission from the National Artists' Association in 1992.

*"It's crazy just to have a one-off relationship with an artist. I continuously learn from them, I think artists bring a lot to an organisation and if you give that relationship space and time, I have a very strong conviction that artists are the soundings for a wider culture within society, a wider cultural consciousness."*

Gilane Tawadros, a-n Collections: Collaborative relationships, 2005

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# WHAT IS A CODE OF PRACTICE?

A code of practice takes commonly-agreed principles of good practice and demonstrates why and how they should be applied. The code of practice for the visual arts, published by a-n the artists information company, draws from the experiences of practising artists along with those of commissioners, curators and others with whom artists work. It looks at the principles that underpin good practice, and makes connections with examples to show how they work in practice.

## **BEST PRACTICE**

There are real rewards for those who collaborate with artists and take full advantage of the breadth of skills that artists bring to projects. Artists' creative approach to project design, development, management and delivery enriches the collaboration with a creative skillset that provides innovative solutions and flexible partnerships.

## **PRINCIPLES**

Good practice prevails where artists

- CONTRIBUTE CONFIDENTLY
- PREPARE THOROUGHLY
- COLLABORATE CREATIVELY
- AIM HIGH

# FIRST PRINCIPLE

good practice prevails where those who work with artists

## CONTRIBUTE CONFIDENTLY...

...by engaging with the development of ideas, and solution of problems; by refusing to pigeonhole and to be pigeonholed; by challenging stereotypes and assumptions about who knows what; by being generous with their knowledge and their skills; by knowing their worth.

Contributing confidently is demonstrated by recognising that each individual has a combination of skills and knowledge that come from training and experience, and not assuming that someone with a specialist role has a monopoly in that area. It requires considering the value of all the resources that are brought to the project, independent of their genesis. For Graham Fagen:

“The starting point is knowing how you function as an artist, knowing your strengths and weaknesses, knowing how you can do the job – how what you do can make sense of a particular context.”

Carey Young is an artist who often works in business settings:

“The language of revolution is consistently present within business”; “businesses often appreciate a critical position”; “business brands welcome notions of dissent”; “business worth is increasingly evaluated on the proven capacity to innovate.”

Richard Layzell was a “visionaire” at software company AIT:

“my involvement has contributed to the company’s success through staff morale, retention and brand’ they see me as adding another dimension to the working life of the organisation’ it broadens the dimensions of what being a software developer means.”

Art and design education expert Linda Ball refers to “the intangible portfolio”, the hidden skills that come from practising as an artist: creative thinking, developing new ideas, solving problems, wondering ‘what if...?’. These attributes are “continually growing and refining, are highly transferable and have lifetime value”.

“The versatility of the contemporary artist” is evidenced by Johanne Mills who, from college days, seized opportunities to work with other disciplines and build her confidence in experimentation and investigation. She can now employ her skills in trend prediction, curating and consultancy, art direction, styling and design, making her highly attractive to fashion houses, press and media.

# SECOND PRINCIPLE

good practice prevails where those who work with artists

## PREPARE THOROUGHLY...

...by finding out about where, with whom and how they will be working; by researching context, legislative implications, location, environmental concerns, potential impact, and interests of partners and colleagues.

Research underpins the effectiveness of every aspect of a project. It strengthens relationships, clarifies ideas, and informs planning. It provides a platform for winning respect and earning trust. It protects against ignorance and bullying. Above all, it demonstrates professionalism and instils confidence among partners.

Carey Young who works across the differing worlds of art and business and understands the prejudices and perspectives of each comments.

“The more research you do into your host and the business sector they fit into, the more you will reassure them that you are asking them for their help for a specific, well-considered reason.

In the complex environments of special schools, hospitals, and other sites for engaged practice, understanding how to negotiate relationships and responsibilities can be key to the quality of the experience.

The value of research to artists' practice is well acknowledged as the progressive thinking of the Arts and Humanities Research Council illustrates. But taking time to learn about other worlds and practices is as valuable.

Ceramic artist Kate Schuricht says:

“I spend time building relationships with galleries and I have a lot of sympathy for their financial situation. But I do draw up clear agreements that come from my experience of what can go wrong. When this happens I want to make sure the same mistake is not repeated.”

For artists, research is the crucial ingredient when considering how best to promote themselves and how to place a financial value on their products or services.

“MUF has always taken the view that the research process that every architectural project involves is not necessarily just the preparation for a building – it is often an end in itself...”

It's essential to ensure you know who is responsible for insurances, permissions or licences for an event or project, as well as adhering to health & safety regulations, the terms of The Children Act and other legislations.

# THIRD PRINCIPLE

good practice prevails where those who work with artists

## COLLABORATE CREATIVELY...

...by establishing mutual respect and recognition: through identifying shared goals, encouraging the views of others, welcoming open and informed discussion, valuing complementary skills, cooperating and collaborating in achieving a vision without losing sight of their own identity and integrity.

Genuine partnership working is often difficult, always rewarding. It demands commitment. It involves knowledge, trust and respect. It challenges partners to acknowledge and to value the contribution that each can make. At best, it strengthens creativity and supports risk.

Artist Graham Fagen begins all his encounters with sessions aimed at “knocking preconceptions on the head”.

“I need professional regard from all the people I’m working with to make the job work. professionalism is about trust in both directions and trust as part of a team. building confidence in each other opens up more and more opportunities.”

Artangel respects the chemistry of the commissioning process that enables artists and audiences to explore new, uncharted territory, giving a commission space to breathe. While in his work with Glasgow City Council’s Development & Regeneration Services, artist Maurice O’Connell recognised that although projects he devised were never realised they acted as a focus for discussion:

“The key element was to find a space where host and artist might find common ground – to reach a position of mutual engagement not simply motivated by a desire for equality but by a shared need for serious critical dialogue.”

Collaboration can be part of an organisation’s culture. Muf describes “the deliberate generation of a sufficiently generous atmosphere to make room for different disciplines and personalities”. When the purpose is less clear achieving mutual respect is trickier. Soda’s residency at Pfizer had a clear brief: use their experience in change management and understanding of technical research issues to bring together biologists and chemists for the first time.

But this is not to imply that artists need to wait to be told what is expected. Carey Young approaches residencies with a clear sense of what she has to give:

“The more you are seen as an independent specialist, the more respect you will get. avoid the notion that you may be a ‘useful’ individual. do not let anyone think of you as an employee.”

# FOURTH PRINCIPLE

good practice prevails  
where those who work  
with artists

## AIM HIGH...

...by aspiring to  
bring quality to  
everything they do,  
whether presenting  
ideas, managing  
professional  
relationships,  
negotiating, or  
producing the work.

Quality relates to everything. It is found in the clarity of the brief, precision of the design, standard of the construction, calibre of the materials, sensitivity to context, attention to detail and overall fitness for purpose.

It is as crucial in the relationships between partners as it is in the handling of concepts and inanimate materials.

“I’m confident and I do what I say I’m going to do. I know my work is strong intellectually and visually.”

Ben Coode-Adams’ confidence in the quality of his work is one of the reasons he gives for his success in securing commissions and making a living.

Attention to the organisational detail is “part of the art-making” for Nina Pope and Karen Guthrie. Their project TV Swansong employed a planning process more commonly used in corporate business to ensure that they had anticipated and addressed all the aspects of successfully realising a complex and demanding project.

US-based artists agency Artisan commits time and effort to ensuring the quality of its brokerage:

“we consider ourselves to be artists’ advocates. we communicate with our artists on a daily basis, help them with getting the best price for a project and make sure they get what they are worth in the market place. we check in with artists on every job, making sure that it was a good fit, the work was satisfactory and that they felt comfortable working in that environment.”

Hidden Art’s open studio events recognise that people “enjoy buying work direct from designers rather than through impersonal retail outlets”, while international markets are developed through trade fairs in London, New York and Milan and Hidden Art’s own website.

Making or buying time to develop the quality of the work is a constant challenge for artists. Awards, fellowships and bursaries at key junctures in an artist’s development provide a critical environment or space, as Colin Andrews confirms from EMARE residency, to “conduct a thorough and timely re-evaluation” of the work.