

Cultural Understanding

Case Study: Triangle Arts Trust

Partners: Triangle Arts Trust / Kuona Trust

Location: Nairobi, Kenya

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Introduction

Established in 1982 by Anthony Caro and Robert Loder, Triangle Arts Trust is set up as a network of organisations and artists-led workshops. Through its activities, the Trust encourages experimentation, artists' mobility, exchange, and fresh thinking with an emphasis on process and professional development. Workshops and residencies encourage dialogue among local, regional and international artists and seek to involve local communities in cultural exchange through open events that offer general access to the process of art-making. Over 3,000 artists have participated in Triangle workshops and residencies taking place in more than 20 different countries around the world over the past two decades. The activities have left a considerable mark on artists' development and community involvement in the visual arts. Each workshop and residency programme is organised by a Working Group of local artists responsible for both fundraising and logistics. These activities build confidence and self-reliance and attract voluntary input from the local community.

Activity

Triangle Workshops brings together a group of 20-25 artists to work collectively within a single space for a period of two weeks. Workshops are initiated by a local working group of independent artists and are separate from museums or academic environments. For this reason, workshops focus on process rather than product or theme.

At the end of the two weeks, the workshop hosts an Open Day which is both a celebration of the project as well as way of involving the local public in the developments and results of the workshops.

The Triangle Residency is an extension of the Triangle Workshop. As such, residencies have a strong focus on experimentation and process, benefiting from the development of new contacts with artists and the opportunity to use local resources to inform one's own practice. Residency periods vary from two to three months according to the location and allow the artists to focus for an extended period of time on their own practice within a new environment that stimulates creativity with its new resources and challenges.

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Impact

Triangle workshops conclude with an open day and residency programmes are always complemented by outreach and educational activities developed as a means to provide artists with a wider set of resources as well as a way of involving local communities in the process of art-making. As part of a flexible and grassroots structure of Triangle activities, the involvement of local communities is generally very wide. A series of outreach activities at the end of the workshop or during the residencies nurture a familiarity between the artist to the local community through talks and seminars in schools and universities, as well as through educational workshops and projects.

The following individual account illustrates the personal of the impact of a Triangle residency upon Maria Buchner, an Australian artist who participated in the Kuona Trust International Artists Residency in Kenya, in 2006. In turn, her comments demonstrate the contribution she was able to make upon the resident community.

Kuona Trust reported:

Maria Buchner applied for and participated in the Kuona Trust International Artists Residency, supported by the Commonwealth Foundation in 2006, with participants from the United Kingdom, Zimbabwe and Kenya, where the Kuona Trust is based.

During the residency, Maria conducted seven workshops in total, working with children from Watoto wa Kwetu and Mathare Community Outreach, both in Mathare, and with Neema Children's Centre. Some of the children Maria worked with had no previous experience of art-making and in her own words Maria described working with them as both enlightening and emotional. Further to her workshop at Neema, Maria provided the materials to create a permanent art corner for the children through which they could continue to make art after her departure.

The residency closed with an exhibition held at the GoDown Arts Centre. Maria's piece, an installation entitled 'overflowing with opportunities', consisted of a mahogany chest of five drawers, water and a pump. The water collected in the bottom drawer was pumped into the top drawer which then overflowed into the lower drawer until it collected once again in the bottom drawer, thus the cycle continued.

Maria Buchner reported that she 'benefited from the programme immensely as it enabled me to learn so much about Kenyan and East African art. The arts community hopefully benefited from my stay in Nairobi through this exchange of ideas and contacts.'

Lessons

- Discussion and collaboration between artists develops individual practice and encourages artists to examine their own place within the arts, locally and internationally.
- Collaboration between artists and institutions with an international outreach encourages understanding between cultures in an organic and unforced way.
- Residencies and workshops are an ideal platform for communities of all kinds to learn from and engage with a process of art-making.