

Pioneering Fine Art KTPs?

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In July 2010, Acme Studios and Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, University of the Arts London began a two-year Knowledge Transfer Partnership. This is the first time Fine Art practice has been the subject of a KTP; the project has generated significant interest and it is hoped will pave the way for other arts-based KTPs.

The project reviews the changing form and function of the artists' studio in relation to contemporary art practice through an extensive programme of research, studio visits and interviews. The culmination of the KTP will be new briefs for design specifications and management protocols for future artists' studios, which will help ensure that Acme continues to provide and manage studios which meet the changing needs of artists. Critically it is also an opportunity more generally for Acme to engage in a creative dialogue which explores and challenges how it operates now and in the future. The project's findings will be made public through lectures, conferences, symposia, case studies and a publication in 2012.

Securing a KTP to develop new designs for artists' studios, based on robust research into current and emergent fine art practice, is a very important next step for Acme and of value to the affordable studios sector as a whole. The project will enable Acme to ensure that its support of artists in economic need with high-quality, permanent, affordable space is in tune with their changing requirements. The results from the KTP are already impacting upon decisions being made by Acme concerning their future business models and acquisition of studio space.

The project is being undertaken by Arantxa Echarte, the Artists' Studios Research and Development Associate, who is based with Acme full-time. Arantxa is employed by the university and jointly supported by Graham Ellard for Double agents, the research project based at Central Saint Martins which he leads with Professor Anne Tallentire, and Acme Chief Executive Jonathan Harvey. The total budget for the project is £130,000, jointly funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council and TSB with Acme contributing 30 per cent of the total.

The development of the project:

During the initial phase of the project, Arantxa was involved in a series of research activities including reviewing Acme's charitable purposes, mission and operations, visiting a representative range of studio providers and carrying out a literature review covering a wide range of discourses. This project involves a series of research methodologies such as data gathering and analysis, experiments and conceptual research.

Visiting Studio Providers

A key early objective is to gain a wide and detailed understanding of the studio provision sector both in London and nationally, aiming to highlight the relevance of this research to the sector as a whole. Arantxa visited Acme's 11 buildings in London and also met other providers in the capital including ACAVA, Mother Studios, Gasworks, APT, Creekside Artists, Occupation Studios and Auto-Italia. Elsewhere in the UK, Arantxa visited Wasps Artists' Studios in Glasgow, Platform Arts in Middlesbrough, Bar Lane Studios in York, The Art House in Wakefield and East Street Arts in Leeds. Visits to other providers will be arranged in the future.

Photography project

Photographer Moz Bulbeck was commissioned to record a series of identical studios at a recent development of 30 newly-converted units at Acme's existing Childers Street building, in Deptford, SE8. The initial photos are of the empty studios before occupation and further images will be taken from identical viewpoints at four-monthly intervals over the next two years. The final body of pictures will provide a unique insight into the activities developed within the studios and the transformation of the spaces by each practitioner.

Sessions with students at Central Saint Martins

Also as part of the project Arantxa and Graham Ellard organised a series of seminars with students at Central Saint Martins. These sessions aimed to explore students' current views on the idea of 'the studio', and what might be seen as its priorities, based on their experience in the School and their expectations of becoming practising professional artists.

Interviews

Thirty artists have been selected to be interviewed formally in order to gain further understanding of the use of the studio in relation to different practices and practitioners. The 'oral history' interviews will be recorded and kept as part of Acme's archive.



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