

## ***Contemporary Collections and Collecting in Scotland Series***

Event 3: Dundee

January 20<sup>th</sup> 2010

### **Event description**

This was the third event of the *Contemporary Collections and Collecting in Scotland Series* - a component of the National Collecting Scheme Scotland 'Phase 2' Research and Development (2007-2010).

Attended by 40 individuals from 30 organisations, the meeting sought to provide an occasion for new thinking about areas of focus and priority for future strategic development and investment around contemporary collections and collecting, and to consider the usefulness respectively of developing strategy and of forming a Standing Group and/or advisory network on the promotion, development and use of contemporary collections.

The meeting will feed into the evaluation process for National Collecting Scheme Scotland Phase 2, which is being undertaken by Dr Tina Fiske in line with the conclusion of Phase 2 on March 31. That process will produce evaluations of both the NCSS partnership and of the *Collections and Collecting Series*. There will also be recommendations for a possible 'Phase 3' of the NCSS initiative.

### **Summary notes**

#### ***Mapping: current positions and recent developments***

Building on the mapping process initiated with the May event at Tramway, the Dundee meeting was an opportunity to further flesh out the terrain informing contemporary collections and collecting in Scotland, to expand the range of voices feeding into the overall picture and to begin to reflect on what that 'map' might lead to, or what it might serve. The meeting heard updates on initiatives such as Art Fund International and Artist Rooms, from further voices – production facilities (GSS), commissioning venues (Tramway; Fruitmarket) - as well as about new research (ICC/DCA PhD) and about research that the mapping has enabled through already

revealing certain gaps (KS/patrons research). The group acknowledged the fact that collections and collecting ‘has brought together people in a way that no other topic of discussion does because it unites us all’. Also recognised was ‘the intellectual energy’ that the Dundee group and participants of the wider Series have contributed to the mapping process, and the benefits of the process itself to those participants. Those benefits included the ability to articulate areas of working, of mutual interest, of overlap or concern, or to feed into planning at any early stage.

- **‘The intellectual energy of this grouping is allowing a kind of map to emerge of what is actually happening across Scotland, so the terrain is becoming clearer.’**
- **‘We assume that we know what each other does. Having a forum to hear about what others do helps you to understand the opportunities. How do those discussions take place?’**
- **‘This forum gives a chance to say ‘this is our position, this is what we do, and this is what we don’t do.’ There is a certain amount of expectation: we don’t do certain things, and often there is little chance to say why.’**
- **‘It strikes me that the importance of a forum like this is in ensuring that things don’t seem to be in competition.’**
- **‘In Scotland, you have various types of infrastructure; we are interested in establishing a collecting infrastructure; there is also an infrastructure of production, of commercial galleries, of artist-run spaces and visual art galleries of international standing. You have those elements and it is how they layer up through an issue such as collecting/collections.’**

*What are the areas of priority/focus for future development and future investment?*

Areas of priority articulated by various Dundee participants coalesced around the issue of *access*: the accessibility of artworks; the movement of works between institutions and loaning; work around engaging audiences with often challenging contemporary art - all raised with a specific focus on capacity, resources and on sharing to facilitate these areas. The lack of planning around capacity and the resourcing of capacity was conveyed as a key inhibition to the kinds of ambitions embedded in the partnership working of the NCSS for example. It was ear-marked as

needing resolution in respect of any future emphasis on partnership working or inter-institutional working. The outcomes of resourcing a system of access can be seen with Artist Rooms tour 2009, which achieved an estimated 700, 000 visitors outside of London and Edinburgh. Resourcing of the tour is guaranteed till 2012, but the long-term issues around capacity and resource will very likely come to the table with that too. Access also raised in relation to measuring and evaluating impact - increasingly important on the political agenda - with Artist Rooms proposed as a providing a structure for doing so.

- **‘... phrases like ‘national distributed collection’ were part of what we talked about – awareness of that was quite strong ... It is one of the tricks we have missed through lack of resources and capacity. We must make the works available, but no one has the capacity to do that or make use of that.’**
- **‘It is important to focus on access too and sharing of information on this; sharing how education officers engage audiences, with quite difficult work in some cases.’**
- **‘The relationship between what gets commissioned, what gets exhibited in Scotland is going to become ever more crucial – in terms of funds and making sure we work more closely with those organisations that are investing public money producing new work.’**
- **‘Artist Rooms has created a system for evaluating impact that could feed through to and be used by advocacy channels. It is about articulation ... about creating visibility by which other things might happen’**
- **‘We are part of one sector – which can become inward-looking. We can forget about what we are doing *for whom* ...I would like to see someone who stands outside the sector – who isn’t internally focused – rethink those lines of engagement ... Looking to rearticulate those basic outward principles at the heart of our position.’**

*Do we need a strategy to progress future working?*

In response to the question of strategy and whether it might develop from a mapping process, it was felt by the Dundee participants that a vision rather than a strategy

might suit better the fluid and heterogeneous character of the sector and the grouping that has developed around the Collections/Collecting Series in particular. A vision or ‘a framework to imagine the future’ were proposed as a means to harness the qualities of the sector, which could enable a more opportunistic and responsive way of shaping developments, and allow an ‘agenda to be set at this level of discussion, where issues are coming up.’ It was recognised that the Scottish context accommodates a spectrum of different perspectives and that, in the visual arts in Scotland, ‘there is something that brings all of the different perspectives in and succeeds in doing so.’ Also noted was the need to tie vision to action, for vision and discussion to have ‘momentum’ because they are trying ‘to reach a certain point,’ that the sole outcome the Series and the group it has facilitated not be a ‘talking shop’

- **‘Can we have a vision rather than a strategy?’**
- **‘The circumstances that we are in, which are very fluid, are working against any form of strategy – vision is more opportunistic.’**
- **‘But strategy doesn’t have to be something developed by a management consultant that takes six months and costs £60K.’**
- **‘... in terms of vision, vision is important, but it must be vision and action. Vision means we’ll get together and talk about things, but we need actions to come out of it.’**
- **‘This discussion has had a momentum because it is trying to reach a certain point – you need a framework to imagine the future.’**

*Where can developments be led from?*

Focus for this was primarily around institutional leadership – particularly in relation to those organisations with an obligation (whether statutory, or as held by membership bodies) to undertake a leadership role. There was some consideration of partnership projects between lead organisations/agencies – such as Scotland/Venice (Scottish Arts Council/ British Council Scotland/ NGS) - as models that achieve funding and impact. Further discussion around leadership and models as well as the partnership value of the HE sector is needed. Raised also, the need to think about how different leadership can come forward, and to consider the relationship of institutional and individual leadership to what is understood by ‘sector-led.’ The key issue of

credibility emerged, as a factor that derives in part from lead partners as well as the quality of what is produced. The credibility of a sector demonstrating its shared commitment also noted: 'Having these discussions we have a deal of credibility, in talking about how our collections are formed and the resources it takes to do that.' Ways to articulate and capture this were discussed, including of the possibility of a Memorandum of Understanding or of articulating a collaborative agreement between key agency/institutional partners backed by broad advisory forum.

- **'... in terms of institutional leadership, there are representatives of organisations here that have a statutory obligation to fulfil a leadership role ... I am interested in the dynamic of those provisions in relation to collections and the present issues.'**
- **'Partnership is about unpicking and understanding and then agreeing at certain points along a journey, not necessarily agreeing to a common goal.'**

#### *The creation of a standing group*

Discussion around the proposition of a standing group focused on the compatibility of a formalised committee and the 'very diverse voices' coming through the grouping. What the relationship between a standing group and a wider advisory forum might be, and how to evolve to capture and sustain that 'intellectual energy'? Emphasis placed on retaining the diversity of perspective and enabling a mechanism to co-ordinate, articulate and represent, but not necessarily direct, the development of an agenda at an advisory forum level. How this might be tied into any Memorandum of Understanding or collaborative agreement? Also raised were:

- the kinds of discussions or platforms that might form part of the programme of an advisory forum (such as a focused context for those programming contemporary art and the collecting institutions to share their mid-term plans at an early stage),
- what regularity of meeting/level of participation might be manageable,
- and where those should be developed and convened from?

- **‘The interesting bit is the bigger forum and how that feeds up. Is that to be keyed down to six individuals? Practically, it may be that something smaller is needed that instigates that.’**
- **‘You don’t need 6 people in a room, saying this is how its going to be ... It needs to be multi-faceted, not one particular thing.’**
- **‘A forum for discussing programming three years down the line and tying that up with some of the collecting institution’s agendas would be fantastic.’**
- **‘There is something to be said for a focused organised meeting. I’ve seen it in London, where they meet twice a year – Tate Heads of Programme, Jenni Lomax, Margot Heller. People sit around a table talking about their programming and their long-term thinking. Arts Council England is there, other funders.’**
- **‘... a tremendous benefit that [the research associate’s] post is within the university context and has had that structure and credibility, and also that commitment. Looking forward, that is what you will need.’**

### **Next Steps**

- **March 31**: Evaluation documents and recommendations for a vision for an NCSS Phase 3 are due from Dr Tina Fiske, along with research outputs from Kirstie Skinner.
- **Late April**: The recommendations will be circulated to the participants of the Series.
- **Late May /early June** (date tbc by 31/03): A meeting at the University of Glasgow for those who wish to continue being involved – to provide an opportunity to feed back on the recommendations and to articulate what they can bring to future developments as well as how they might benefit from them.