

YORKSHIRE  
SCULPTURE  
INTERNATIONAL



# ARTIST STRUCTURES OF SUPPORT

This is a transcript of a talk that took place on Wednesday 25 March 2020 via Zoom. The talk was originally programmed to take place at The Hepworth Wakefield and due to COVID-19 was reconfigured as a pre-recorded online talk. The talk is available to watch on Yorkshire Sculpture International's [YouTube page](#).



Top-left: Emii Alrai (she/her), top-middle: Lily Lavorato (she/her), top-right: Helen Pheby (she/her), middle-left: Rosanne Robertson (they/them), middle: Connor Shields (he/him), middle-right: Jane Bhoyroo (she/her), bottom-middle: Meghan Goodeve (she/her)

Meghan Goodeve: Hello and welcome to Yorkshire Sculpture International's event 'Artist Structures of Support'. I'm Meghan Goodeve and I'm the Engagement Curator for Yorkshire Sculpture International. Yorkshire Sculpture International is a partnership project between the [Henry Moore Institute](#), [Leeds Art Gallery](#), [The Hepworth Wakefield](#) and [Yorkshire Sculpture Park](#) - and in summer 2019 we launched our first collaborative festival showing 18 international artists across the four galleries and outside in the city centres of Leeds and Wakefield. We also ran an extensive engagement programme reaching over 47,000 participants, and importantly for this conversation, investing in artist talent development in Yorkshire.

Since January of this year we have been in a research and development period reflecting on 2019, doing lots of reading, talking to people, and considering how we build the festival for the future. This talk is part of this process and will feed

into key research around how we can support artist career development in Yorkshire. When organising this talk at the end of last year we didn't realise how urgent this topic would be in light of today's global pandemic. So we will aim to address issues connected to this very human emergency, throwing a light on how we can create positive social action in our locality for both artists and others. Some issues that will be raised in today's talk will have already been present prior to COVID-19 but are now somewhat amplified.

We would like to use this discussion as a way to generate ideas on how Yorkshire Sculpture International and its partners can play a role in answering these worries and ensuring the health of our artistic ecology in Yorkshire and of course our wonderful artists.

As ever, thanks to our funders and partners Arts Council England, Wakefield Council and Leeds 2023 for their continued support and for enabling this talk to happen today. I now have the pleasure of introducing our speakers and our chair for today's talk. So, I am going to start with Connor. Connor, can you give us a wave? (Connor waves) Thank you.

[Connor Shields](#) lives and practices in Leeds, and in 2018 received the Yorkshire Sculpture Park graduate award. Through an amalgamation of found and created materials, Connor's work develops as a sculptural response to formations of masculine identity and experiences of growing up in a post-industrial town. His work questions the adopted gender roles that we easily accept and assume, encouraging the viewer to unpick these perceptions.

Next up we have [Emii Alrai](#) (Emii waves), thank you Emii. Emii is an artist based in Leeds and was commissioned as part of Yorkshire Sculpture International 2019 to work collaboratively with a group of English as a second language [\(ESOL\) learners in Wakefield](#). Emii's practice is informed by inherited nostalgia, geographical identity, and post-colonial museum practices of collecting and displaying objects. She focuses on the ancient mythologies from the Middle East alongside personal oral histories of Iraq, weaving together narratives by forging artefacts and visualising residues of cultural collision. Emii has just opened a [solo exhibition](#) at The Tetley in Leeds in February of this year, which is sadly closed, but it is a wonderful exhibition.

Next up we have [Rosanne Robertson](#). Rosanne was one of Yorkshire Sculpture

International's [Associate Artists](#) in 2019 exhibiting their work 'Stone Butch' within The Hepworth Wakefield's Barbara Hepworth collection display, and as part of the Associate Artist group exhibition '[Associated Matter](#)' at Yorkshire Sculpture Park. Their practice spans sculpture, photography, drawing and performance to explore the boundaries of the human body and its environment. And I'm really pleased to say that following Yorkshire Sculpture international, Rosanne has been commissioned to make a public sculpture by Sunderland Council as a legacy to the seven hundred women who worked in Sunderland's shipyards. Recently, Rosanne has been a short let studio holder at Porthmeor Studios in St Ives, continuing sculptural works that explore the queer body in the natural landscape and you can see some of that work behind them now (Rosanne shows work in their studio) and not quite see the beach which is also lovely.

And to chair the conversation we have [Helen Pheby](#) (Helen waves) who is the head of the curatorial programme at Yorkshire Sculpture Park, with a specialism in art beyond the gallery and its central role in society. Helen and her team are invested in supporting the careers of artists, most notably through her collaboration with Selfridges to commission early career artists to realise large scale public commissions, as well as creating residency and exhibition opportunities for artists at all stages of their careers at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park and internationally.

You may have noticed there are two other people on today's call and they are my colleagues who are part of the Yorkshire Sculpture International team. We have Jane Bhoaroo (Jane waves) who is our Producer and Lily Lavorato (Lily waves), thank you, who is our Programme and Marketing Coordinator.

We'll be leaving the call shortly for the round table discussion and then re-joining at the end to ask the audience questions we have collated prior to today, so thank you to those that have given us questions. Jane is then going to provide a round-up of today's discussion. But before we start, I just want to thank the artists and Helen for agreeing to continue this talk in a new format. It has taken a bit more thought and organisation than we originally realised, but we all felt it was particularly important for this to go ahead and to have this conversation. So please bear with us as we are using new software for the first time and trying this way of working for the first time. We will also be sharing this conversation at a later date as a transcript for those of you who would prefer to read it and not watch it. We apologise for not having any subtitles on

this Vimeo but we hope to get this sorted as quickly as possible. I am now going to pass over to Helen who is going to start the conversation with Emii, Connor and Rosanne.

Helen Pheby: Thanks Meghan, and thanks for the invitation to be part of this, which I think is a really important topic and discussion about how art institutions and publics can really support an artist ecology. And I'm really encouraged that over the last few years there do seem to be a lot more artists either moving to Yorkshire or staying in Yorkshire if they have studied there, rather than a pilgrimage to London. And I think there a few reasons for that, but it's really healthy I think. And I realise a lot of stuff has changed since we first started talking about the questions today, so we have worked through those to try and make them more relevant to the current situation as it unfolds so quickly, but also the future, what comes out of the other side? And how can we help everyone to become as resilient as possible through that process?

Rosanne, I realise you are no longer based in Yorkshire, but at some point you have all chosen to be based in Yorkshire and to live and work there, and I wanted to understand what you felt were the advantages and disadvantages of that decision really.

Connor, I know that you have moved back to Leeds having grown up in Middlesbrough, studying in Leeds and then going home and coming back to Leeds.

Connor Shields: Yes, so like you said, I studied in Leeds, this is where I started to develop my career, to develop my professional studio work, and obviously since graduating I won the Yorkshire Sculpture Park graduate award and I think that was a great start to help me in starting my career. But when I did graduate, and had done the residency and everything, I did actually move back to Middlesbrough for a year, but I noticed that a lot of the work that I was doing was back in Yorkshire so I was constantly travelling back and forth. I had some work on track and I saw that out, and I ended up moving back, but I chose to move back [to Leeds] because of the connections that I have here. The Sculpture Park had been really great and had introduced me to other people and I started to get a lot of connections around here and I have only been back a few months, so there is just a lot more opportunity for me here.

Helen: Do you think there are some disadvantages to being based in Yorkshire as well?

Connor: Yeah, I do think like you said, everybody seems to gravitate towards London. There is obviously a lot more funding in London than other areas but I think things are changing. There is a stigma around needing to be in London to be an artist and be practicing but I think that stigma is starting to change, particularly in Yorkshire right now, people are looking to Yorkshire for sculpture.

Helen: And that is why something like Yorkshire Sculpture International is so useful.

Connor: You have the three major art institutions – you've got the [Yorkshire] Sculpture Park, The Hepworth [Wakefield] and the Henry Moore [Institute], all in one area.

Helen: And Leeds Art Gallery as well, so all of those venues, together, working collaboratively. How about you Emii, have you always lived in Yorkshire, have you moved around?

Emii Alrai: So, I came to study in Yorkshire in 2011. I initially came down to study English and sociology and dropped out, moved back to Edinburgh where I pretty much grew up, and then went back and got into the Fine Art course at the University [of Leeds] and I just really lucked out because the course was really great and really supportive, and I just found the content of it really interesting. One of the reasons I decided to stay in Leeds, or in Yorkshire generally (Leeds is where I stayed), was that in the year above me there was a collaborative called [SEIZE Projects](#) that was made up of different artists in the year above. They had graduated the year before us and had got involved in the local artist-led scene. And I guess we are all working different jobs, and also trying to support a practice and having studios, and I feel for the first time it seemed to be something that was sustainable and that was a career option... something you could do. When I was coming up to graduating, had I not had that then, I would have been like 'I do not know what I am going to do with my art degree'. I didn't really think that being an artist would be at all a route that you could go down or that you could adapt it... I thought I would do something that isn't being an artist, but having had people who were engaging with what was going on in the city, using spaces. At the time it was much easier to get short let spaces or set up studios and that was really inspiring and I thought I could probably get a job, and get a studio, and balance the two and live. I guess I stayed in Yorkshire because all my friends were doing the same thing.

Helen: Do you think that there is an advantage in the fact that Leeds is smaller than London? But that there is a tighter network perhaps?

Emii: Yeah, I think so. I feel that my experiences of London are so little, I have never really spent very much time there or know how their ecologies of artist networks work, but it does seem like there is obviously a lot going on in London and there are a lot of different kinds of spaces that kind of interconnect. I don't know whether Leeds has that as much, but I do think that is something that is growing and I think there are different avenues, different cultural centres that are popping up in Leeds that I think are bringing people together, in a way that maybe is kind of echoing London, or what I presume to be London. I do think Leeds is a really good place and a place that's constantly evolving, it's not had something written for it in some ways I feel London has.

Helen: Do you hope think there is scope then for institutions to have more connection with artist-led spaces and with universities and to try and join those relationships up a bit?

Emii: Yeah, definitely. I do think that there could be more opportunities for artist-led spaces or artists who have graduated. Having a platform as the jump between having studied to suddenly being outside the education system and feeling a bit like they don't what they are going to do... how am I going to get a show? It would be quite interesting to see how institutions and universities can offer pathways for students to return and develop their practice.

Helen: It has been useful to think about that. We do have the graduate award but that is only one a year, but there could be a way for maybe more people to use that as a pathway. We definitely see that as a transition. That when you leave university and you don't have a studio or peer support and suddenly you are out there, whereas we can help soften that journey a little bit. And how about you Rosanne?

Rosanne Robertson: Well, I moved to Yorkshire from Manchester, so I studied in Manchester and then lived there post-graduation, so my first studio was in Manchester and all the sort of ways I developed post-education was all in Manchester, all the sort of DIY stuff that I did was over there. But then I moved to Calderdale, so I lived in Todmorden and Hebden Bridge, and I have got to admit that I actually continued to say that I was a Manchester-based artist while living in West Yorkshire for quite a while. My identity as an artist was really linked with a bigger city and with Manchester. As a queer artist that was

still a big part of my identity and I was quite hesitant about saying that I was a Yorkshire-based artist and that feels a bit strange now, now that I have been so connected with the place via different galleries and by YSI [Yorkshire Sculpture International] it definitely feels part of my identity as an artist, but I think it was a difficult move at the time.

Helen: Do you think that is partly other people's perception of Manchester versus Yorkshire as cultural centres? Or is it more bound up with where you grew up?

Rosanne: I think so, I think it is an outside perception, and that I think my anxiety at the time was that is better to be connected with a bigger city so it is this thing of like London or Manchester. And I think also just because I'd developed a lot in that city I felt quite a strong connection to it, but that's why things like YSI are really important because we all have connections with the place we live and work, but it really joined me up to the conversation a lot more. So even the history of sculpture in Yorkshire, it helped me feel more connected to that and that is now a big part of my practice. So even though I did move off quite quickly after the end of YSI, I didn't do that because Yorkshire wasn't a great place to be based as an artist. I did it because I felt like my practice was really developing and could keep developing on from that. So moving down here is just part of my development but it might not have even happened if I hadn't been part of YSI or been in Yorkshire.

Helen: All part of the journey.

Rosanne: Yeah.

Helen: And I think like Connor said, I do think there is a shift. I feel that as somebody who grew up in Wakefield and was told as someone growing up in Wakefield to lower my career expectations. And also, not to apply to Central St Martins as I wouldn't get in because I was from Wakefield, so I feel throughout my career things have changed. And it was a long time ago, to be fair. But also I think the current situation that we are constantly, minute by minute, adjusting to, trying to make sense of this uncertainty about what is happening next, what is around the corner, just taking it a day at a time. But I'm already noticing that there seems to be a sort of levelling up just in this immediate situation. Everybody is in the same situation, everybody has access to the same content. All the museums and galleries are closed pretty much around the world. So

suddenly, in this moment, it doesn't really matter where you are. I don't know if you have felt that at all or noticed that?

Emii, have you thought that through with your networks? Have you felt that suddenly in some ways you are more connected digitally because everyone is online suddenly?

Emii: Yeah I think so, it's opened up a lot of avenues about how people are sharing work, how people are being a lot more forward. I feel like I am not amazingly in tune with Instagram, stuff like that, I do use it but I try not to spend loads of time on it. At the minute I think it is nice how people are taking different kinds of challenges, posting their work, making their work accessible. [Basim Magdy](#) put his entire videography online, and [Lawrence Abu Hamdan](#) as well – there are works that maybe normally I would never have watched but now I feel I have the access to them and it's great to be able to see that. I do think people are stepping up and sharing a lot of things. There are artists who have always done that as well. Now that everybody is in the situation where all the museums and galleries are closed and we don't really know what is going on, it's interesting how everybody is being a lot more open, there is just more sharing.

Helen: And have you noticed a difference Rosanne? I suppose it is slightly different for you because you are in Cornwall, and you are in a different context anyway than your studio.

Rosanne: I do think it does still matter where we are all based or where we chose to be connected with. My whole project was about a connection to place, it was very much about landscape and physicality, and it completely changes our access to physical space and connection and contact has completely changed very, very quickly. It overnight made me think about opening up my practice in new ways. I think little parts of my practice that were only open to me in my studio, I'm thinking about more ways of opening that up to people in more accessible ways. I have just started filming myself doing my drawings which I don't usually share with anybody and I thought that this might be something that people want to see, because my plan was to have an open studio at the end of my time. How can I have an open studio? How can I bring the studio to people digitally in a tangible way? So I started filming myself in a way I had never done before.

But I think it is a sort of leveller, everybody is in the same position, but what I would like to say is that I think there have been artists working in this way for a very long time – disabled artists and artists with chronic illnesses for who the internet has been the place where they share their work and where they operate. I think disabled artists are really leading this field. Looking through my Instagram people who are saying 'hi, we have been here forever' and now everybody is looking at these platforms saying 'let's do everything in this new way'. It's not new. People have been doing this for a long time. People have had the challenges that everybody is facing now, a lot of people have been going through for a long time. All the anxieties that a lot of people are facing now, disabled artists have had always. I think we have to look at disabled artists and how they are using online platforms in a really creative way and how they are leading in access. This could be a really good opportunity to realise how programming could completely change digitally and with disability arts leading on that because they have been for a long time. Instagram accounts I am looking at that are just so useful, I just wanted to mention a few: [invalid\\_art](#) and [hot.crip](#). Artists like [Bella Milroy](#) and [Romilly Alice Walden](#), and zines like [ablezine](#). It is a good time not to re-invent the wheel, and look at what these artists and organisations have already been doing.

Helen: I think that's a really good point, and it has shone a light on a different area of practice that might not have had as much attention as it should have done. I think it also gives institutions, it has made me have a moment of pause about how ... do we carry on doing everything the same way after? How do we use this space? As we have grown up with access to the internet it has suddenly become such a vital resource in our lives right now, hasn't it? I think it will shift the way people don't just take the internet for granted. I can see after this happens, people travelling a lot less, either because there aren't any airlines, but also they don't need to. You don't actually need to go and do a talk overseas, you can do it like this. And how about you Connor? How are you finding things changing?

Connor: Like you said earlier, I think we are all sort of in the same boat right now with everything closing down and everything being on a complete lockdown near enough. The ways that this talk has been re-formatted, they chose to do it differently, for it still to go ahead, I think is a learning experience. Looking at new ways of how can we bring this conversation forward? How can we keep it going, without it being a face to face discussion? Then it opens the question - is it a lot more accessible now like you were saying Rosanne.

Can more people have access to it than they would have? Not everybody can get to Wakefield, essentially everyone can see this from all over the world, wherever they want to tune in and see it or read it online, so, does it open it up to more people? And I think that it does. I think it is actually a really good way of doing it and I think we will all learn a new way of working after this. I think we will be a lot more aware of how we can do things differently.

Helen: What do you think the positives might be? Already the environment seems to be benefitting, but whether that is just a short term thing and then as soon as we get through this it will be full systems go again and we are not going to learn from it. From an optimistic point of view what good will come out?

Emii: The one thing that I think will be really good is to kind of know what is really important in terms of trying to upkeep a practice and also trying to upkeep employment, because I feel like it is so easy for artists to burn themselves out when they are balancing so many different opportunities, or trying to get the next opportunity. Trying to balance that with work and not looking after yourself very well. Now, you know, I think there is a lot more time for us ... we can't leave our homes. So just to kind of think what is it that is important to us. Trying to find time to do that and I hope, stuff like that, maybe reading or researching. I don't know what it is but maybe the more holistic side, which I think sometimes gets pushed aside because it is always about 'I need to reply to this email', 'I need to do this or this'. That kind of frenetic way of living and that pressure that I think a lot of young artists put on themselves. Not just young artists, just artists all over, I do think there is this pressure to keep going, to get the next thing. Smash it out, smash it out, smash it out! I hope this period will let us be like, you know what, it is fine, we can just take it slower and that's not a bad thing at all. That's definitely something I hope will be a lasting legacy of this, being like it's fine.

Helen: It is almost questioning the whole idea of progress isn't it? We have all been lulled into this sense of believing that we are progressing and getting better as a species and actually we never thought we would be vulnerable to something like this. This is something that happened to people before us, or in another place, and suddenly it has exposed what a construct that was really. And all that we thought was important, is actually not that important. It is a really interesting moment to pause and recalibrate. What do you think Rosanne?

Rosanne: Yeah, in what you are talking about I think that it can really get us to consider ableism and how we operate. How ways we have been operating are ableist in that sense, because there is a lot of things that people are now considering in terms of health and wellbeing, and a lot of conversations that people are having that they weren't really having before on a mass scale. I think that it's going to be really useful going forward that people continue to have conversations about care. I think it can also highlight the precarious nature of how a lot of artists and freelancers and self-employed people are operating. So I think it can highlight conversations around poverty and low-income. I think something like this just shows how little of a safety net there is for artists and self-employed people and freelancers, all dependent on this gig culture or zero hours contracts or low-income, part-time employment and how... you know, when the news of this virus came out I was at The Hepworth Wakefield, at The Hepworth research network and I was in this bubble of not understanding the extent of what was going on I think. Then, when I came out I had so many emails about things being cancelled and it just dawned on me, okay, so all of the avenues of my income in the next few months are shutting down and then the panic seeps in. How am I going to make any money? A lot has come out since, but at that moment, in the short term, you realise you have no support, no sick pay, you've got no cover for stuff like this.

One of the frustrating things I find about the art world is the inability to talk about money and we have to because artists are in really precarious positions where if something like this happens, even if something like this doesn't happen, a lot of artists are in poverty anyway and don't have access to food, gas, electricity and proper housing and stuff like that. So I would like to see us not going back to not being able to have conversations about things like this and what would be amazing if we could put some actual structures of support in place that was a safety net for artists. I think the Arts Council coming forward and doing an [emergency fund](#) and small grants and stuff like that is coming through, but if artists are actually honest about what it is like if you are from a poor or working class background, or even if you're not, when there isn't enough pay to go around really. I think this is an opportunity to have conversations that highlight those conversations that we could have been having.

Helen: It is definitely highlighting that and it is highlighting it across a societal level. Those at the lower-end of the economy financially are the most exposed to something like this, but because it is such a mass problem now it is getting a lot of attention, a lot of focus. What do you think in an ideal world the solution

to that is? What does it look like? A universal salary? Or... I mean I am not saying that any of these can be practically employed but what would the solution to that be do you think?

Rosanne: I think some kind of formal support because I think what people realise... I don't know... the Arts Council coming forward with support or organisations you usually work with coming forward with support is dependent on... the Arts Council gave instructions to try to support where you can and there is talk of redirecting funds to help support artists but it is always dependent on each organisation making that decision or within their capabilities. So something more structured that has a basic safety net I think.

Helen: Is that because there is no continuous income basically? Unless you have a job outside of your practice, you're reliant on project to project, gig to gig.

Rosanne: Yeah, gig to gig. And I think organisations can fall into the habit of treating artists as if they are working in an organisation as if they are in the same way as they are. You get asked to do quite a lot of stuff that people who work in the arts have got a wage coming in do, but artists get asked to do the same kind of things but we don't have the back up. We don't have any of the support that comes from working for a large organisation. We don't have holidays. We don't have sick pay. We don't have any of these securities. And I think some of the little things that might seem little to some people, like when you are asked to do the unpaid admin and all of that unpaid work that comes with it, can build up quite a lot.

Helen: So on a very kind of practical level, what do you think institutions can do to help soften that economic strife? I suppose to not have such high expectations of what an artist is able to do for a fixed amount of money, perhaps for one thing.

Rosanne: Yeah, I really just think to consider what they are asking artists to do. And just to understand that situation that we are in that we don't have that support around us. Our support comes from working from project to project, working with an organisation. It doesn't come from anything sort of fixed. I think it is useful to just not assume that artists have got any financial security, just understand how precarious the situation is.

Emii: My experience from this, because I work four-days a week and I balance

the one day that I don't work, and then my weekends are in my studio and alongside that. And I think it's that also in this situation, I find myself in a very lucky situation as I do have my job and I do have a salary coming in. But before the lockdown, it becomes so unmanageable to actually take on projects and to actually build on the projects you are getting, because the financial money coming in from them is actually very little and it doesn't give you any stability. And when you have commitments like care or if you are paying your rent, whatever, the option to not have a job is really difficult. In my situation I feel like to have a stable job in case it doesn't work out. I have a brother with autism and if the art stuff doesn't work out, at one point he is going to be my responsibility so I need to have that stability. To be able to provide... I don't know maybe it's that what you are asking artists to do alongside the other commitments they are juggling and to give stability. I do think that is something that we do want, to be able to plan things for the future. There are so many people at the moment whose funding has been cut or their projects have been cut and they just don't have that. It is really uncertain... it's really shit.

Helen: Do you think there is any scope for building a culture of collecting, of buying art in Yorkshire? It seems to me that there is so much money in the commercial sector but that is a really elitist and removed aspect of the art world. Whereas trying to facilitate artists to be able to sell their work, because I don't think a lot of people it crosses their mind that they can. They may go to a shop up the road and buy something that is mass produced and have it as something in their house that they enjoy, but I don't think it is even part of their mind set for a lot of people that for the same amount of money they could buy an original artwork. Do you think that is something that institutions could try to help create channels for?

Emii: Yeah, certainly.

Rosanne: Yeah.

Connor: Yep.

Rosanne: I think a lot of artists in Yorkshire, or maybe just the North in general, work with publically-funded galleries... the conversation around selling work... maybe the galleries that I have worked with are not commercial galleries and they don't see it as their position to sell work which is fair enough, but it would be really useful if I could sell some work and have the platform to do that. I

think when you are talking about the disadvantages of being Yorkshire-based, or I think it can extend to the North of England, it is the lack of opportunities for gallery representation and commercial opportunities. I don't think it is just an elitist thing to sell work. I think it's such a useful transaction, to sell my work could mean that I could afford to live for another 6 months and afford to eat.

Helen: Also, it gives people an opportunity to have something in their homes that they really treasure that isn't just the same thing that everyone else can access, that is very special to them. Because that is something I am really interested in developing more at the Sculpture Park, is giving that platform, because we have selling exhibitions anyway. We have them through our craft and retail arm and it just seems a bit of a no brainer that we could be doing that for you know, everybody.

Connor: I think that's why a lot of people don't go into the arts and look at it as not a real career because a lot of people think you can't make money out of it. And it is hard to make money out of it, like everyone has been saying about selling your work and how it is perceived and how people don't think about buying it. But I think if that is something that is encouraged and the institutions encourage people to actually invest in art and invest in artists. Then maybe the arts would be seen as a viable career that people can go into and make a living off. I think the three of us are privileged to practice as artists and make some money from it, but then I do have separate jobs too and so does Emii. So I think it would be good for institutions to find some way to encourage people to invest in artists because then I think more people would want to go into the arts and it would become more of a career path. Whereas alternatively funding has been cut in schools because it is not seen as a necessity or something that will bring the money in, but creative industries brings so much money into the country and that's overlooked, particularly in education.

Helen: I think you are absolutely right and I think another thing that is coming out of this moment all across the world is how much people value culture. When they haven't got anything else they have still got music, and singing, and dancing, and art, and creativity. And I really hope that is something that people remember that it's not like [Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs](#), where it is the icing on the cake when everything else is sorted out, it is actually something really fundamentally about who we are as people. How do you think the creative community is going to get through this? I know you can't predict the future, but what do you feel are the immediate concerns and what the opportunities might be? Connor?

Connor: I think creative people always find different ways to approach things and how to get things differently so I think creative people will always find a way, like we have found this way to do this digitally. What was the second part of the question sorry?

Helen: Just the immediate and then the longer term challenges and opportunities, I suppose. And how it does seem to be bringing people together, not physically obviously, but mentally. And psychologically and hopefully I suppose that can be built on once we get through this and things don't just go back to how they were.

Connor: Yeah, maybe keeping a mindfulness of what has happened and what could have gone wrong and being aware of how things could be done differently going forward. What support structures can you bring in that weren't there before? So if, God forbid, anything on this scale happened again, what could be put forward ... I'm sure the government will be putting things into play after this thinking what are we going to do to support people if this happens? What can people do, what can artists do, what can institutions do to put a safety net in place so that if it comes down to it, like Rosanne was saying, with a lot of freelancers going out of business? What can we put in place to ensure that... and I am not too sure what that is but it is obviously something to be worked on.

Helen: How about you Emii?

Emii: I guess similarly feeling that way. I guess one of the positives of it is finding different ways of working and different ways of interconnecting. I don't know, I feel like a week ago I would have never thought of having a video call like this ever, with any of artists, or any peers, or any other artists from around the world. I never would have thought this is a way of getting to talk to people and to talk about this. Could that be a way of going forward? A way that you can do residencies that will become way more accessible for loads more people, like artists with disabilities, artists with access problems... not problems, that wasn't the word I was looking for... I don't know, I think things like this are really good, the community has shown it is really willing, from the little I have seen online. I guess the concern is how will artists be able to support themselves through this? How will funding streams go in? Will there be commissions? Or things that take place in this virtual way? What happens if people have sculptural practices, how does that translate? And I think that is something

that everybody... well, something that I am questioning at the minute, how do I think about things in a different way? I don't really know, I mean it's still very new and very weird and hard to predict but I do think that there will be a lot of positives to take away from it.

Helen: It is pretty terrifying the way it's thrown everything. Everything that we knew has been turned upside down but slowly it feels like certain sureties are starting to... I don't know, it is amazing how people quickly adapt isn't it? And how resilient people are. What do you think Rosanne?

Rosanne: Yeah I think just going back to what I was saying about disability arts and artists with disabilities and chronic illnesses leading in this realm. I think it could be really exciting to see more digital programmes but led by disabled artists and artists that have already being using this in a really exciting way. I think there could be some really exciting collaboration and I just think programming wise there is just going to be completely new ways of working. Like I hadn't used Zoom before, I hadn't thought about connecting in this way, and even though it isn't something I would naturally think of doing, I am now thinking more of what I need and more about who can access my work. If I can share my work more digitally then I can access more people. The way that I am doing my open studio now, rather than being for a few people that can get to this location, it's going to be for a much wider audience and I think it can change programming completely. And what I would love to see happen from it is the artists who have not been able to physically access our galleries and museums and opportunities, but who are doing really exciting and creative things online already, will be part of programmes going forward. I think it could be a great opportunity for access.

Connor: Just quickly adding onto the end of that. Sometimes gallery spaces and studio spaces for somebody who doesn't have an arts background might find it quite intimidating. So maybe having something where they can watch online, from a 'safe distance' if they are quite wary, could engage people who don't have that background and who don't usually go to those spaces. So again, opening up audiences and thinking about who can actually participate and get involved, I think that will be good for that.

Helen: So ironically though we have been kept apart there is scope to break down barriers that have already been broken down inadvertently. Which is really positive. I am going to bring Meghan back in now to... I know we've got a

number of audience questions that have been pre-sent so I think if Meghan has those.

Thanks everyone that was really, really interesting.

[Meghan, Lily, Jane re-enter on screen]

Meghan: Jane are you going to join us as well?

Lily: Is Jane coming? Yay.

Meghan: Thanks so much. So we've collected some audience questions in advance and thank you again for those who have sent them in. Lily and myself are going to read them out... well, we are not going to read them out, we are going to ask them in our own words and Lily is going to start so I am going to hand over.

Lily: Yeah, cool. Thanks everyone that was really interesting. So this first question is kind of asking how you approach self-care in your practice normally and also thinking about how you might approach self-care in your practice now in the situation that we find ourselves. Any thoughts on more specific ways that you might do that?

Connor: I think that I don't give myself enough time off usually and I think we have touched upon this a few times earlier. Particularly what Emii said about being a young artist and being early in your career, I feel like there is a pressure to always be on it and always on to the next thing, on to the next thing. And when I do give myself time off my mind is always working, thinking about the next thing to come up, so I never give myself a mental break. So this has actually been quite a refreshing experience as with everything in the foreseeable future cancelled, I have got nothing for my brain to focus on next, so I have been forced into giving myself a real break. It has been nice to have that mind space and decompress. Going forward, something that I will be doing is actually making sure that I do have this time to take for myself and to actually take time off, because, you know it is your work, you are passionate about it, it's your job at the end of the day, you need to give yourself time. I think moving forward I will make sure that I have breaks where I let myself completely switch off.

Rosanne: We do work in a really competitive field where the culture is just to keep going and I think it's often just driven on sheer determination by people and the culture of just having to say, or feeling like you have to say yes to whatever comes up. It's just that precarious nature of not knowing what opportunities will be available as there is only a certain amount of opportunities available anyway. I feel like my best work always come from when I just stop working and just trying. That is what I did last year, giving myself the time to just experiment and be open to new ways of working. I think as far as possible, I mean this is really anxiety-inducing situation and I know a lot people's mental health is going to be affected by it, but, if it's possible to just go with the flow with the situation, to re-group and take time, if it's possible. When you are in this situation of powering away, powering away, with your work and the opportunities that come up, it is quite difficult to feel like you have to let go of that a bit – so I'm just in the process of trying to let go a little bit at the minute, taking it easy. Self-care wise I have got three cats and I just try and take time to cook. I really realise how wasteful I have been, and thinking about food and all the panic buying going on, I'm using every little bit of resource and food and being more thoughtful. Yeah, it's really changing where I am at and how I am thinking at the minute.

Emii: I feel like similar to what you have both just said, taking the time now to just take a bit of a breather and to allow ourselves to actually have the space to think about work in a different way or read the books that have been collecting dust on our bookshelves because we are just too busy. I feel like I had a really bad week last week trying to get to terms with everything that is going on, taking some time away from my phone and the news, to get myself on track.

Helen: There was an escalating panic and lack of control. Pretty much everybody going 'how is my job?', 'what is the future?', 'My house?', everything ...

Emii: I felt like there was also a pressure to keep going and behave as if its fine to quickly do a transition into doing things online, and I found that very overwhelming. And it has taken time to move to the process of accepting this is the situation ... hopefully my family are all alright. There are more important things and I just hope everyone else is ok too and the situation gets better. Before this my only solace, self-care, was doing a skin-care routine, every morning and evening. Skin care is my time to be ok ... moisturise very heavily. I feel like it really keeps me in check!

Lily: Those are great. When I think about how much you are expected to do as an artist when the situation wasn't like this... You kind of stop and you are like wow. You kind of stop and you are like wow. Balancing spending that time to make your work when you want quite a lot of peace and quiet and a clear mind, but then also balancing that with applying for opportunities and having loads of things in your calendar, it can be really difficult so it was interesting to hear your take on that.

Meghan: I have a question here which is around alternative and non-formal structures for arts education and I think Emii you touched upon this right at the beginning when you were talking about people in the older year group having an artist-led network. This person would like to know about what non-formal networks are you part of that help you develop as an artist? Or if you are not part of them, what structures or networks would you like to see?

Emii: Since Yorkshire Sculpture International, when I was lucky enough to be one of the Engagement Artists, I think that there has been a really nice network built from that as a more formalised external network. I found that really useful, as well as [The Tetley's Associate Artist programme](#) which was really great to have. But before that, me and my friends started a crit group in Leeds called [Nocturne](#) and we found that was really useful for trying to bridge a gap between finishing and graduating university to not having anything. There are regular crit groups in Leeds now, which is amazing. But at that particular time we only had each other and our friends who were also making work to bounce ideas off, or to create an environment where we could actually have these conversations and support each other. The networks that have been informal have grown from friends who want to keep making. And I want to question what it is that we are doing, how do we get the opportunities and how do we support each other? I'm very grateful and lucky to have people in Leeds who are open to doing that and are still, with artist-led spaces and trying to open that up into broader programmes.

Connor: I think also the same about critique. For me personally, I think critical conversation is essential for the progression of my own practice and to develop. Sometimes when you spend a lot of time in the studio and you don't have any other eyes on the work it is easy to go a little bit astray, if that's the right word. I am doing a studio residency funded by my old university Leeds Arts University and part of it is mentoring, so I am using it for critique while making work and that is something that I think is helping with the progression of my practice. But that is only going to last until June, so I have been talking to peers

about starting a crit group similar to what you said you were doing Emii. I think artists are good to facilitate that, whether it could be adopted or helped out on a larger scale it depends.

Helen: I think it is something that I personally would definitely be interested in being a part of, and I am sure that other people in the region would be as well, and that is why we are talking about how institutions and artist-run spaces can join up and contribute to the ecology and help it flourish.

Meghan: There is obviously the peer critique, peer learning that happens between groups of artists which obviously relies upon, I think, friendship and giving your time for free. But then in terms of institutions there are definitely opportunities where we can add a different dimension to that, which is around us such as mentoring so it is not always other artists giving their time for free basically.

Helen: It is also about us being able to learn. I want to learn more about who is based in Yorkshire, and I want to do that research, and I need help in connecting as well.

People recommending you should talk to them, or this group are doing this really interesting work, so it is kind of a two way thing.

Meghan: Yes. Rosanne, do you want to add anything?

Rosanne: I think a lot of my education as an artist did come outside of formal ways of learning. After my degree in Manchester, I was part of all the DIY culture including [Islington Mill Art Academy](#) – alternative art education. I was part of that for a while, and then I was part of something called [Kraak Gallery](#) and a lot of the artists I was working with were making these platforms for themselves. I ran my own artist-led project with my partner Debbie Sharp, [The Penthouse](#), which is still run now as more of a nomadic platform. I do think those relationships between those projects and the institutions were really important, and I think neither side can provide everything, but if working together I think they can do really interesting things.

Lily: So, next question is, how you see your practice shifting within the context of COVID-19? So more specifically, how you are going to approach that, especially because you all have quite object-orientated studio practices and

work with sculpture. How you feel that is going to change? I think this question was mainly aimed at you Emii but everyone else is free to chip in.

Emii: It's something that I am still trying to think about in terms of how I am going to change the way that I make work. I am currently up in Scotland and I am going to be with my family for the foreseeable future. So I'm not with my studio so I can't make and experiment with various different materials, but I do have some clay here so I am going to try do some stuff with that. But mostly at the minute, I am quite interested in taking the time to do research and read books I have been meaning to look at, and also to do some writing and do things like drawing, which is something that I really love doing but has fallen out of my practice, and I have not really given it time because it has been very focused on making sculptural work. So I am quite interested in giving myself the time to actually do that, doing paintings and sketches for things, and maybe sharing that on an online platform at some point. I'm not really sure. In terms of the context of the work that I do, I am thinking about how we will archive this time, how we might change the narrative of this time when it's over. How do we record of all this and document it for the future? It would be quite interesting. Definitely for me it's going to be a lot of time doing drawing, doing some writing, and some reading, maybe some pots, who knows?

Lily: Some pots ... anyone else?

Rosanne: I don't like the idea of my practice being less physical, because I was really at a point where it was becoming more physical, and I was really enjoying the relationship with materials, and thinking with materials, and I want obviously to continue to do that. I'm still accessing the studio because I can do that without any contact door to door and still be in this space for the next three months. Artists using this space are usually from elsewhere in the UK or Europe, the next two artists who are booked in to use this studio are not coming so I have actually got this space for another three months, but whether I will be able to use it or not is a different question. I've not thought about if I was at home what my practice would be like...I don't want to think about it yet. It has made us think of different ways of sharing. My work usually involves performance for camera and that was shared through some short videos last year as part of YSI and also photography, so I might think of ways of expanding that further ... I don't know how that is going to go yet.

Connor: My practice is predominantly object-based so I've not been in the

studio for the past week or so. I've been staying away for a little bit just to be safe so I'm taking this, as I said earlier, as my little break, my little bit of time off. But I do a lot of writing behind the scenes which has never reached the light of day. So usually when I make a sculpture at the start of the process I am always writing to try and make sense of it in my mind. Recently, I have been looking at some of the stuff I have written because I save a lot of it, and just seeing if they could be possibly published online as pieces of work in themselves...sort of how I view the sculptures in process, whether it is written quite poetically ... or whether I adjust it. I am sort of playing around with the text right now and seeing how that could be a piece of work in itself. And that can work when I have got no access to the studio, times like now.

Lily: Great, thanks.

Meghan: Great. I have a question here which is more for Helen and Jane, which is from a late career artist who is beginning to make large-scale and interactive sculptures. They wanted to ask what is the best way of them accessing opportunities to show work or get advice from organisations and institutions in the region?

Helen: We do accept proposals, but we receive a lot and that would be at [curators@ysp.org.uk](mailto:curators@ysp.org.uk). We have quarterly curatorial meetings where we look at all those proposals. We do try and feedback wherever possible and be constructive about supporting an artist if that project is not taken on. Even if we are not able to progress an idea, because most of the time our programme and budget is already over committed, we are always constantly building a research database of artists who we may want to revisit in the future or do studio visits, so that would be my suggestion.

Jane: Meghan, from our point of view [Yorkshire Sculpture International] as well, we are interested to see how artists are working in the public realm as we connect with different local authorities from across Yorkshire and different arts organisations. Obviously Yorkshire Sculpture Park are very well tapped into that too, but if we can offer any support around our knowledge about opportunities for people wanting to commission work in the public realm, contact us at [hello@yorkshire-sculpture.org](mailto:hello@yorkshire-sculpture.org)

Meghan: Brill. The last audience question we have is how Yorkshire Sculpture International and the partners can be proactive in supporting artists right

now? But I wanted to use this question for each of the artists and Helen to focus in on one take away action, or something that they think has come from the conversation and is a really important thing to take forward. If anyone is happy to let me know what they think?

Helen: One of the key things I am taking away from the whole thing is adaptability and how that is going to be vital to every individual business, institution, and artist. But also how important it is to keep talking. We don't know what is going to be at the end of it, but if we talk it through we will find solutions together, we just can't predict what it is going to be like.

Emii: Keep on talking. Whether institutions can form platforms like this where it can be a hangout, or a place you can talk or share work. It's a really hard one to pinpoint. I think there are definitely ways in which they can support and whether there are ways in which artists can do workshops, or can deliver classes, or whatever way to support an artist's income through a virtual way could be really interesting and be really useful for artists who need that at this time, and also a way to keep practice going. Doing artist talks that can be screened that people can tune into would be interesting and providing a source of funding for artists who need it at this time. It would be useful for people to interact with this kind of content as well as reaching a different audience would be really good.

Rosanne: I think the idea of some online collaborations could be really interesting. I don't know how we would do it. I hadn't thought about talking to artists in this way online but it could be really useful, whether I organise something like that or I think it would be good for organisations to do more talks like this and to not just put everything on hold. Realise that working digitally and doing events in this way for artists to still get paid to do this and workshops and talks that they would have had over the next few months, I think is really useful. It could even address the problem of representation, you could maybe have solo presentations online, online exhibitions, artist talks and stuff like that.

Connor: Thinking about how we can support artists going forward in the future in situations of hardship, I think that this is the start of this and researching those ideas. If we can't have access to The Hepworth, where this was meant to take place, how it can still go forward and how the artists can still be supported. How it can happen anywhere and it's happening from home, I think this is a good start to that. Continuing to look at ways that this can still be

facilitated even if this goes on for months at a time, how things can still work with limited resources.

Meghan: Thank you so much. That is the end of the audience questions so I am just going to hand over to Jane to finish up for today.

Jane: Thank you so much. I feel like we should almost revisit in a month's time to see how everybody is getting on. Thank you so much to you all, to the artists and to Helen for your contributions; for responding so positively to this new format which seemed to work really well, we appreciate you doing that; for your insightful ideas and contributions; to making us all think how we should programme going forward, and how during our period of research and development, we can continue to invest in and support artists like yourselves and artists across Yorkshire. Thank you also to the audience who have sent in their questions and contributions in advance. Special thanks to my colleagues Meghan and Lily for making this happen.

We really want to continue this conversation with a wider audience and to hear ideas in the coming days and weeks, about how we can think about creating time and space for artists, what we can really do over the coming weeks and months to make sure we are adapting and enabling things to happen through this constantly changing landscape. As well as thinking when we go back to some kind of normality about what we can put in place for artists. I would encourage people to submit questions to [hello@yorkshire-sculpture.org](mailto:hello@yorkshire-sculpture.org)

We are going to think about how we are creating open forums such as this in the near future so we will be in touch through social media and our website about how we are going to that. On a positive note, if you are feeling creative, our artists have already given a lot today so I am not asking them to get involved, but if you would that would be great, we have #asculptureaday where we are encouraging everybody to get involved and create a sculpture in less than five minutes from what you have in your home. I know we would love to see as many people get involved with what has been a really enjoyable and fun project. Thank you all for today, and I look forward to more of this.

All: Thank you.

Helen: See you all soon hopefully.