

Working with Organisations

Video Transcript

Hello and welcome to video 3 of 4 and today we'll be talking about how to work with organizations in the art world. My name is Josephine Reichert I am the artistic director of Ort Gallery. A quick audio description of myself I'm a white woman in my 30s I'm wearing a red t-shirt and a very brightly coloured cardigan with oranges and grey and whites and pinks. I've got blonde brownie hair that is shoulder length and half of it is up in a ponytail and I'm also wearing some large brown wooden hoops.

A quick disclaimer today's video is based on my own experience and Ort Gallery's experience of working with artists and it's obviously not an exhaustive list, but hopefully it will give you a lot of insight into how to approach organizations how to work with them in the first place. This video series is funded by Arts Council England so we'd like to thank them for supporting this work.

Right so I'm going to get straight in: How can you work with an organization as an artist? Number one: you can work... you can apply to a vacancy. So

organizations put vacancies out and obviously depending on the size of the organization they will have small teams up to you know hundreds of people that they work with who they employ these are fairly straightforward methods like in many other industries you apply through a job description, send in your CV if requested and a personal statement and then you get invited for an interview.

If you have no experience of working with an organization it's obviously difficult to get a job if you have very little on your CV so lots of artists start by working in organizations as gallery assistants. So they invigilate the space or they might do front-of-house work, they work in the catering department so essentially sort of entry-level jobs and there's obviously nothing wrong with that and there's also nothing wrong with doing that all your life just as a side note, but I know from sort of looking around me in Birmingham how a lot of artists sort of get in. That is a good way of getting into an organization because it allows you to sort of get a fairly simple access into the organization and then once you're in you can meet everybody in the team all the way up to CEO. It is much easier to sort of speak to people, meet people.

Obviously working, you know, in the front of house or in the in the shop or in the galleries looking after the artwork doesn't necessarily mean that you have sort of a gateway into getting jobs further down the line. However it does mean that you meet everybody, you meet curators, you meet artists, you meet you know international people. Really you can meet a lot of people that way however it can give you an insight into what it's like to work in the arts industry and also give you some work experience and also just open your eyes as to what you maybe actually want to do which job is the right one for you, which one you don't want or also maybe you don't want to work in an industry sorry in the arts organization that you're currently working for at all and it's just a side hustle to sort of complement your income as an practicing artist.

Number two: you can of course volunteer for organizations I've already mentioned this in video number two and I'll just very quickly go through it again there is a very fine line between an opportunity and exploitation and volunteering is sort of like the thin ice. So for yourself you have to protect yourself you have to make sure that you can afford this opportunity and also that you can, that you have a, I guess a goal in mind when you offer volunteering

work to an organization or take up the opportunity. Please also make sure that you don't go into an illegal contract so organizations have to pay you if you're doing a job that they should be paying for, so for example if they ask you to run you know their Instagram account they should be paying for that. So it wouldn't be legal to do that voluntarily and you know unless there are sort of specific reasons for why that's happening.

So if you're not sure whether it is you know a legal setup that you've, you know, a contract that you've signed or a situation that you ended up in, I will leave some links in the description box on how to find out whether what you are doing is legal and if it isn't how to proceed because it's really important to know your rights and to stand up for them as well. Not all organizations will you know intend to exploit sometimes things slip through the net so you know there's different reasons for why things happen.

However volunteering just like taking up a vacancy can be a really good way of boosting your CV getting work experience getting into an organization in the first place and sort of being there.

Of course, placements are a really good way doing this in a much more concise way, so placements are usually like a week long or two weeks long and they tend to be for people at a specific stage. So they're just about to finish school they're just about to finish college etc so it's worth looking at whether your school or your college offers this or if not. You can also just you know go to an organization and ask for a placement but what's good about a one week or two week placement is that the organization will have more of an onus to actually give you a full picture in that short amount of time rather than you being there for months and months without really progressing I guess.

And this goes back to what I sort of briefly mentioned earlier around having a clear idea so I think for all of these opportunities I've mentioned so far it's really important to have an idea of why you're taking up this opportunity and what your long-term goals are here so you know you might say well I'm going to do this for a year and then I want to move on to the next rung on my imaginary career ladder or it could be that you know it's really important for you to actually gain the experience like literally be in the organization see how people work how it all unfolds behind the scenes.

And once you feel like you've got a good grasp of that you want to move on so whatever it is I think have something in mind and also have a time frame of mind in mind of when you want to move on from that position. Like I said earlier on there's nothing wrong with being you know working in front of house in an arts organization your entire life but I just think it's worth thinking that through whether that's what you want to be doing if it is brilliant, but if it isn't make sure that you don't get stuck as such in a role that doesn't feel quite right for you.

Number four is you can respond to commissions, call-outs, residencies, open submission exhibitions all of those kind of things I talk about that in depth in video number two so please have a look in the description box there'll be a link there to that video.

Number five: there are also often specific opportunities for graduates or people at a certain stage in their life and these opportunities tend to be around gaining experience or a partnership between the organization and maybe a university so it's really worth having a look at what what's out there and making sure that you don't miss these opportunities. Some of these opportunities are also paid so you know it's always worth looking into it.

Next is you can run a workshop or an event for an organization so this can either be responding to a call out or you approaching the organization saying you'd like to do this. I feel like for a lot of people that has a bit of a bad rep to be running workshops or events but actually I think that's not fair I think I need to split them up: Running workshops isn't necessarily just for you if you want to be going into teaching. There's a lot more to running a workshop than this sort of teaching career. If you have any interest in bringing people together working with young people, children, families, anything along those lines running workshops can be a really amazing way of bringing arts to you know the wider general public.

And if you have never done this before you can ask to shadow a workshop or workshop leader this can be a paid opportunity or sometimes as volunteering if you can afford it and just to get your head around everything that's involved in running a workshop because from my own experience it's quite an art to do that well you have to be very well prepared and then when you're actually delivering the workshop you have to be very good at responding to whatever comes up in the moment. A lot of artists run workshops sort of on the side that's one of their way of you know making an income and then the other

side is obviously being a practicing artist and there's nothing wrong with that at all. I think it's a really great tool of connecting to audiences communities and it can also influence your artwork so especially if you have a social streak within your your interest or your subject matter it's really worth looking into.

But even so even if you don't have a social agenda you know if you're a photographer for example running photography workshops can be a really great way of thinking about your own practice differently meeting people meeting you know other emerging talent you might you might meet the people you want to work with or start a collective with so I really wouldn't just ever dismiss it as something that's you know low art or anything like that.

Most organizations tend to have a Learning Team already that's already in existence so they might not need any artists to come up to them and be like oh you know I'd like to run a workshop because they might already have a whole program. All of this you can find out very easily via the website so please do your research before you contact an organization.

But you might be able to offer the organization something they are not currently offering so it's always worth contacting the Learning Team, an officer within the team who might be the best person to speak to. You can also call them the front-of-house and ask who's the best person to speak to about this and to make an inquiry I wouldn't be scared of if it's very specific. So for example if you live in the same neighbourhood as this organization and you know the local community well and you have good links that would be a really interesting way to say well you know I can connect you to certain communities or I have a very specific skill that I can teach that lots of people don't know you know. Whatever it is it's always worth making contact or also looking out for those opportunities when they come up.

Events run slightly differently to workshops so events can be things like let's say for example a poetry performance in the gallery space or live music or a reading. It could be a party, it could be you know something separate from what the gallery is already offering, if it's a gallery, or it could tie in with their program. Either way, events are really important in programming for most organizations for several reasons: They connect organizations to their immediate community, they connect them to very

specific communities if the event is aimed specifically at a certain group, it can also be a way for the organization to raise some funds for example. So you know if they run a regular very popular poetry event it might bring them some income.

Events serve lots of functions so if you have an idea for an event that you'd like to run they might be willing to support you or you could apply for funding to run this event at their organization and provide them with room hire or maybe get room hire in kind. This might be an easier way to work with an organization than to sort of show up and say I'd like a solo show.

Events sit under different individuals within different organizations depending on the size so it's worth finding out who to speak to whether it's the curator, whether they have a program manager or a producer or whether they have... that it's under Learning. A lot of this you can find out via the website usually so do your research.

My next tip would be to ask someone to introduce you if you know anybody who might already have a contact at this organization who you'd like to work with then ask them to introduce you it is so much

easier to break through that initial what feels like a closed door if you know anybody you might say oh I don't know anyone but really have a think around sort of who you are already in contact with who you might have studied with or who you might have just randomly met at an exhibition opening and who might be willing to help you. It might sound a bit weird or unlikely but I think you'll be surprised as your career develops how many people you get to know if you're just friendly and speak to people so you know worth thinking about.

This leads me to my next point and goes back to something which I think I mentioned in both videos: [Networking:] go to exhibition openings attend events, in the UK most of these tend to be free, and just speak to people introduce yourself, be friendly, flatter whoever organised it. Research beforehand who they are so you recognizing them and you don't just you know ignore them you can just say oh I really enjoyed it thanks for organizing this event it doesn't have to be you know networking in a really technical way. I certainly am not a good person to give you advice on that, but being friendly and being around is always a really good idea especially at early stages in your career.

Next is exhibitions: people always wonder how do you get an exhibition at "X" organization and "X" tends to be a very large organisation. Well, people have contacts or people build contacts and build up their career in their CV. And as a side note I should mention again: Ort is an artist-led organization so my experience is very much based on organizations that are funded by public monies and organisations that have a I guess social agenda within their work and ethos and what I'm about to say will probably not apply to commercial galleries so I'm really sorry but that's not something I'm very well placed at to give you advice on so if that's something that you're really interested in selling your work then you'll have to find a different video sorry.

But if you want to work with an organization that has a social agenda that is funded by you know Arts Council and other trusts and foundations then you can you know through clever planning and contact making you can get exhibitions even as an emerging artist at very large organizations. And I'm telling you this from experience: even over the last year I've seen this happen over and over artists who a year or two ago no one had heard of them are now showing at large local organizations here in the West Midlands. So it's possible, so how do you do this?

Firstly have a plan in place which organizations are you interested in working with? Why? Who are they? Who are the curators that work there and other producers and programmers? Is there something you can find out on LinkedIn or Facebook or Twitter? Follow these people, make sure that you know who they are what they're interested in. Have a have a clear idea of why you respect someone why you look up to someone not just because they are in the position they're in, but maybe because they're a woman or they come from an a marginalized community maybe they come from the same community as you or maybe they have made it against the odds. You know like whatever it is be very clear in your head around why you are interested in individuals and organisations and why you want to pursue them specifically.

You don't have to necessarily tell them this but just make it quite clear in your head why you're doing what you're doing. So then once you've got a sort of 10-year plan in place of where you would like to get to you can break it down into smaller chunks of where you need to get to in the mean time. So there are small organisations, there are medium organizations, then there are very large organisations and it tends to sort of correspond the size of the reach of who they

are, as in audience reach, and also the size in terms of you know how many people work that etc tend to roughly correspond with where they're at in their status. So you know they probably started smaller and grew over time.

So you might want to approach smaller organisations before you immediately go to Tate, right? So smaller organizations tend to be easier to contact because there's a smaller team often when you walk in you might actually meet the individual responsible for planning curating and you could just try and make contact an exhibition opening, an event and just say you know how does one get an exhibition here? Usually a lot of the answers to that question you can research before you ask the question so you can make sure that you are the right artist for that organization. If they have a mission statement on their website usually under the 'About' section and they talk very clearly about how they want to bring more women from Russia to the forefront of the UK arts industry and you are not a woman from Russia then you might not want to go and speak to that organization.

So a lot of organizations are very very clear in who they want to work with and why so make sure that you

know this and you've read this and then basically hand the organization what you have on offer like on a silver platter. So when you send in a proposal for example or you respond to an open call you're already halfway there because you know that you are the person that this organization is looking for you now just have to shine brighter than the rest of your competition.

Most organizations, even small organizations will want you to have a sort of track record something they can look at to see like oh you know what's this person done so far so maybe before you approach an organization you could have a couple of smaller shows where you do an open studio event where you show your work in a cafe. And when you do those events that are smaller and more informal you invite the people who you'd love to show with to you so you try and flip it around they might not be available to come if they don't come you can send them pictures of how it went and you can say oh we missed you and then on the evening but here's some pictures. Make sure that they have a chance to follow your career.

If you now think oh can I just send my CV or my portfolio into the organization please go back to my last video video number two in this I speak at length about doing that rule of thumb don't do it but

there are a few exceptions of organizations who do accept unsolicited proposals, Ort is one of them but of course before you do it make sure you really know why you're sending it to this organization.

Something I mentioned in the last video as well as you can do your own fundraising and this can be done via the Arts Council or other trusts and foundations who support individuals. When I get an exhibition inquiry at Ort and the individual says they're willing to fundraise for their own exhibition it takes a huge chunk of work and pressure off me too. Because when people come to me and say I don't have any money behind me I then have to find that money so not only does the exhibition and the artist have to come up with a really brilliant idea well thought out proposal they also have to... I also have to think which funder might be prepared to fund this work.

If somebody says well I've already got... I've already sent the funding bid off or I'd like to send it off soon and I'd like to write you in it that's a whole other board game because essentially they come in similar to a room hire. They're willing to bring money along with it so it is worth to think about, because all organizations no matter how big have to raise huge

targets you know huge amounts of money and you can... you're helping with that essentially and it can be easy for you as an individual to raise these funds because you've never applied for funding before for example whereas for organizations they can only apply so often to a funder. Of course don't just send off the funding bid and mention: I will show at Ort gallery without ever having spoken to us before. Always make sure that you contact the organization before you send off the bid.

The last thing I want to mention in how to work with organizations is working with curators or producers so rather than contacting the organization the curator or producer will do this for you and essentially be a kind of middleman. I will be talking at length in the next video on how to become a curator and also how to work with curators if you're an artist. So stay tuned for that the link for that video will already be down below in the description box or there'll be a date on when that video goes live.

If I forgotten to mention anything or you have any questions please leave a comment down below or email me I'll be leaving my email as before in the

description box thank you so much for watching today
and thanks again to Arts Council for supporting this.
Bye bye.

Josephine Reichert, Artistic Director, Ort Gallery
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