



Examples of Collaborations between Universities and the Arts

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Introduction

This document has been created to present a range of examples of different types of collaborations between universities and the arts and culture sectors over the last decade or so. It is by no means an exhaustive or comprehensive list, but is intended rather to illustrate some of the types of cultural activities that have been undertaken between higher education and the arts over the last decade or so.

In some instances the projects listed have involved one researcher or a research department working with one artist, cultural practitioner or a single organisation, but sometimes they are more complex involving several stakeholders across both sectors.

Each example that we list is categorised by Type of Activity and Theme, using the categories below. Some examples are cross or multi-disciplinary and many have multiple components.

Key:

Type of activity:

Performances
Films
Public Art
Exhibitions & Curation & Installations
Community-led Projects
Hubs/Incubators/Networks
Festivals
Conferences/Events/Workshops
Residencies & Internships
Publications & Podcasts

Theme:

Health & Wellbeing
Climate
Placemaking/Shaping
Technology
Arts & Science
Diversity
History/Conflict
Contemporary Culture and Society

Films

In the project [‘Compassion for Voices’](#) (2014) a clinical psychologist at King’s College London and an animator created an animated video that was intended to engage the public on combating stereotypes regarding mental health as a therapeutic, educational and de-stigmatising tool. The animator’s individual goal was to develop her skills in terms of collaborative development and incorporating research into her work. The researcher’s goal was to explore the potential of arts practice in engaging audiences. Together, their objective was to create a video together that could educate audiences about mental illness. What made this KE project successful was that these two collaborators were given the opportunity to further their own artistic and scholarly practices in making the film.

Type: Film

Theme: Health and Wellbeing

The 2021 project [‘Coventry Made Me’](#) is an example of clearly defined roles between artists and researchers that stemmed from a clear process of working and an explicit, shared objective; a researcher from Coventry University and another from the University of Warwick worked with two artists to research the ways the city of Coventry has impacted the creative identity of its artists and creatives. The artist then made a film about the findings.

Type: Film

Theme: Placemaking

Publications

A 2016 KE collaboration between the NHS and [Central St Martins](#) produced a visual arts project for renal dialysis patients; a project which was complex as a result of the vastly different natures, structures and cultures of the participating organisations (Central St Martins MA Narrative Environments Dept, Vital Arts (Barts NHS Trust), Kidney Care UK). The project was successful - the participants were able to anticipate the complexities of the collaboration beforehand, plan accordingly and adapt to the circumstances as they proceeded. Their anticipation and planning involved substantive levels of communication that facilitated the process. The final result ended up being a publication titled ‘Community Dialysis Cookbook: Helping Hands,’ which included artwork from the artist-collaborators and input from the patients they interviewed. It became something that patients could read whilst being treated at the Renal Dialysis Unit at Royal London Hospital, enhancing the environment to engender a sense of community and uplift. This project was later featured as part of the Tate Exchange programme.

Type: Public Art, Publication

Theme: Health and Wellbeing

Public Art

In the article [‘Learning about Neighborhood Identity, Streets as Places, and Community Engagement in a Chicago Studio Course’](#) (2018), researcher Ivis García presents a KE project that brought together students to understand concepts of community engagement and placemaking with the creation of public art by collaborating with architects, urban planners, government officials and activists to foster partnerships in the community. The project was successful despite the complexity of so many different stakeholders coming from different backgrounds and perspectives, partly because they all gained something from the experience and partly because the process involved multiple stages and check-ins within the timeline. It was a project facilitated by ChicagoLAB, designed as a placemaking initiative in order to celebrate and preserve Puerto Rican identity in the Chicago neighbourhood of Humboldt Park.

Type: Public Art, Community-led project

Theme: Diversity, Placemaking

Kenn Taylor’s blog [‘A Totem for Hull’](#) (2020) details the commissioning of a public sculpture on the university campus by disabled artist Jason Wilshire-Mills, inspired by participatory work in the community by Artlink and the University of Hull. Wilshire-Mills created the work in a residency as part of the Hull 2017 City of Culture.

Type: Public Art, Residencies & Internships

Theme: Placemaking

Exhibitions and Installations

In 2020, the Museo de Navarra was interested in changing their approach to engaging the public with art and historical heritage, so they invited researchers Amaia Arriaga and Imanol Aguirre from the Universidad Pública de Navarra to help them revamp their curatorial practices [in the context of a KE](#) project. The researchers created a space for social engagement by disrupting the chronological curation of the collections, instead introducing an approach that facilitated analytical thinking on the part of the public. The researchers commented that significant changes were able to be made because the museum invited and welcomed this change, the process was focused and the agreement was in place from the beginning of the process. In exchange, the researchers learned about ways of applying education theory to museum curation.

Type: Exhibitions and Curation

Theme: History / Conflict

[‘Swept Under the Carpet? Servants in London Households, 1600-2000’](#) was a 2016 exhibition that resulted from an ongoing KE project between the Geffrye Museum (now Museum of the Home) and the Centre of Studies of Home at Queen Mary University of London. It was guest curated by Tessa Chynoweth and Laura Humphreys, AHRC-funded Collaborative Doctoral Award researchers from the Centre.

Type: Exhibition and Curation

Theme: History/Conflict

In 2016, researcher Peter Mitchell carried out a collaboration between Queen Mary University of London and the Ragged School Museum for their [‘Ragged Children, Mended Lives’](#) project; he took up a residency in the museum to transcribe the registers from a Victorian school and transform them into public-facing documents for the museum, culminating in an exhibition on children and poverty in the East End. Though the KE project itself was successful (due in part to the small-scale nature of the KE and the support provided), Mitchell noted that the process of simplifying complex research materials into a public exhibition was challenging.

Type: Exhibitions and Curation

Theme: History / Conflict

Community-Led Projects

TestBeds, [a 2019 KE](#) collaboration between the University of Bedfordshire and local artists in Luton was a community-driven incubator, focused on developing relationships between the artists and the university in order to develop the artists’ skill sets as well as those of the university students, and strengthen town-gown relations. It involved 4 strands of artist development for artists at different stages of their careers: Artist Accelerator, Catalyst Co-Lab, Arts Enterprise Zone and Arts Elevator. It was one of four strands of activity in Luton as part of Arts Council England’s Luton Investment Programme. The project was successful, partly due to extensive funding, but also due to sophisticated and clear communication that supported the various relationships between stakeholders. Unusually for most arts KE projects, it was also largely artist- (rather than researcher-) driven.

Type: Community-led Projects, Hubs/Incubators/Networks

Theme: Placemaking

When the University of Greenwich [engaged in a KE](#) project with the Bathway Theatre and the local community in 2020, they had to take into account the complexity inherent in navigating power dynamics that exist between multiple stakeholders (cultural organisations, practitioners, funders, community gatekeepers and local councils). They knew they would have to consider the knowledge and contributions from their arts and community partners equitably alongside their own (as the funding was coming from the university, the most powerful partner in the KE project) as well as the fact that challenges could arise from their distinct cultures of working and communication. Other partners included Galeforce Productions Universal Ltd and the ROMEL Foundation. The aims of the What About Us: Empowering Community Voices programme were to create spaces where theatre and performance-based workshops could find ways of approaching areas of social need caused by social inequality and cultural issues, as well as understanding how these activities could support the local community.

Type: Performance, Community-led project

Theme: Placemaking

In the KE project [‘Walk refugees’ Balkan Routes at Tate Exchange’](#) (2018), University of Liverpool researcher Dr Gemma Bird and Aston University researchers Dr Jelena Obradovic-Wochnik, Amanda Russell-Beattie and Dr Patrycja Rozbicka presented photographs and stories from the impermanent settlements that sprung up in the wake of the peak of the movement in 2015, from their fieldwork carried out between 2015-18 on the route

commonly taken by refugees between Greece and Serbia. In an installation and a series of events and workshops, they discussed the ways in which they documented refugees fleeing the Middle East through the Balkans with photos, and then engaged in a quilting project and exhibition through the Tate Exchange programme at Tate Liverpool.

Type: Exhibition and Curation, Community-led project, Conference/Event/Workshop/Installation

Theme: Placemaking, History / Conflict

This KE collaboration served as a pilot project for what became the London School of Mosaic, a small university, designed to train mosaic artists and contribute to public art in specific communities. The blog [‘Beyond the Campus Community Development and HE: Southbank Mosaics and a new model for training socially engaged artists’](#) describes how this international KE project was carried out by Kings College, University of Connecticut and Southbank Mosaics; mosaic artists and students created a mosaic at a dock on the Thames in London. The project was not only about producing this piece of public art but also about the learning the students undertook in working with local youth and nearby communities and how the mosaic was a vehicle for this. The impact on the students was that they gained an understanding of arts-led placemaking, collaborating with communities on public art projects and the practice of mosaic making. The impact on the local community was that they benefited from the project in terms of co-producing and contributing to the aesthetic development of the local area.

Type: Public Art, Community-led project, Conference/Event/Workshop

Theme: Placemaking

In 2021, Norwich University of the Arts collaborated with Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust to create [‘Hospital Rooms’](#), an art installation designed to transform Northside House, an NHS mental health facility in Norwich. Artists were commissioned to design murals, paintings, prints and video and they ran workshops for service users and staff.

Type: Community-led project, Installation

Theme: Health and Wellbeing

Networks and Partnerships

[‘Liveable Futures’](#) is a grassroots, collaborative network of artists, scholars and activists seeking to share resources and foster creative solutions to survival under planetary conditions of unpredictability and crisis, supported by and based at Ohio State University. The incredibly varied activities have included: dance, music, art, installations, podcasts, performances, film, events, workshops, publications, community projects, with a focus on using the arts to find solutions to the climate crisis.

Type: Performances, Films, Community-led projects, Hubs/Incubators/Networks, Conferences/Events/Workshops, Installations, Publications & Podcasts

Theme: Climate

Festivals and Conferences/ Events/Workshops

[‘UTOPIA 2016: A Year of Imagination and Possibility’](#) (Somerset House, 2016) is a web page presenting a year-long festival of the same name at Somerset House, which celebrated the 500th anniversary of the publication of Thomas More’s Utopia, in collaboration with King’s College London and the Courtauld Institute and Gallery, with support from the British Library, London School of Economics and the British Council. The festival spanned art, literature, fashion, design, architecture, theatre and film, featuring a programme of events, exhibitions, new commissions and activities exploring challenges facing contemporary culture and society, such as sustainability.

Type: Performances, Films, Exhibitions & Curation, Festivals, Conferences/Events/Workshops

Themes: Utopia, Contemporary culture and society

The University of Sussex partnered with Brighton Festival in 2022 to present the [Festival of Ideas](#), which showcased a number of events and works, including art installations, a dance piece, films, games and panel discussions, along with the Attenborough Centre for the Creative Arts.

Type: Performances, Films, Festivals, Installations

Themes: Contemporary culture and society

In 2018, the University of Birmingham and the Royal Shakespeare Company collaborated on a conference called [Radical Mischief](#) where a series of speakers from the RSC and the university discussed theatre and politics in order to explore the possibilities of inter-disciplinary discourse.

Type: Conferences/Events/Workshops

Themes: Contemporary Culture and Society

[‘This is No Longer That Place’](#) (2019) was a large-scale transnational project supported by the Royal College of Art (in collaboration with Creative Europe, 4Cs, The Show Room, Tate and culture + conflict) exploring how arts training/education, art practices and curation could reflect on and respond to conflict around Brexit through audience participation and co-production. Collaborations between large, international institutions brought a wealth of experience and knowledge, in addition to a variety of approaches to executing knowledge exchange. This project resulted in a publication.

Type: Conference/event/workshop, Publication

Theme: History / Conflict

[‘Arts, Science + Culture Initiative’](#) is an interdepartmental, interdisciplinary KE project at the University of Chicago, bringing together arts and science in a series of collaborations involving researchers, students, arts practitioners and members of the public across art history, astronomy and astrophysics, biology, chemistry, cinema and media studies, computer and information science, creative writing, literature, mathematics, medicine, music, molecular engineering, physics, theatre and visual arts. Exploring new modes of artistic production and scientific inquiry, this project aimed to bridge the gap between art and science. The initiative involved guest speakers, scholars and artists; seminars; collaboration grants; workshops and labs for making new work. In this way, the University of Chicago served as a hub for outside speakers and practitioners.

Type: Performances, Films, Hubs/Incubators/Networks, Conferences/Events/Workshops, Residencies & Internships

Theme: Arts and Science

[‘Arts at CERN’](#) is an expansive, complex KE project in the form of a hub and incubator produced by the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN). They commission and develop work and put on exhibitions and events, with a focus on experimental, socially and scientifically-engaged collaborations. For example, British artist duo Ruth Jarman and Joe Gerhardt ([Semiconductor](#)) engaged in CERN’s Collide Residency and produced [HALO \(2018\)](#) is a large-scale immersive artwork conceived as an experiential reworking of the ATLAS detector, its experiments, and its data sets. [HALO 0.1 / 0.2 / 0.3](#) are three animations made with raw data from the ATLAS detector. [The View from Nowhere](#) is a single-channel moving image work which explores man’s place in nature through the science and technology of CERN.

Type: Films, Exhibitions & Curation, Hubs/Incubators/Networks, Conferences/Events/Workshops, Residencies & Internships

Themes: Arts and Science, Technology

[Culture and Climate Change: Scenarios](#) (2016-2017) was a residency for artists and a seminar series that paired artists in the fields of visual art, sound art, photography, film and theatre with climate researchers, in order to produce works that could help the public understand the impact of climate change. This project involved numerous independent artists, as well as the University of Sheffield and the Open University convening research projects, workshops, exhibitions, events and publications. The projects were successful in that they allowed the artists to become more climate-literate in their work and enabled the researchers to present their research to the public in a more creative, approachable fashion. In 2019, they published an anthology of essays, diary extracts and accounts from some of the contributors to the project.

Type: Films, Conferences/Events/Workshops, Residencies & Internships

Theme: Climate

In 2021, the playwright and academic Steve Waters recorded his new BBC Radio 4 drama ‘Song of the Reed’ in the Strumpshaw Fen nature reserve, outside Norwich, in collaboration with the University of East Anglia. The team recorded the programme on site, using the sounds of nature (a ‘wild track’) in order to draw audiences’ attention to the importance of wetlands in the fight against climate change.

Type: Performances, Publications & Podcasts

Theme: Climate

[Cape Farewell](#) is a transnational project based in the UK, established in 2001 in order to bring creatives, scientists and researchers together to produce work responding to climate change. Cape Farewell operates as a network and incubator for partnerships between scientists, artists and educators to find ways of communicating stories about climate change to audiences. As a model, it engages numerous individuals and partner organisations that produce different outputs, such as workshops, archives, artists' residencies, installations and live performances. The work is varied and responsive to different remits, scales and objectives within Cape Farewell's mission.

Type: Films, Hubs/Incubators/Networks, Conferences/Events/Workshops, Installations, Residencies & Internships

Theme: Climate

AHRC Knowledge Exchange Hubs

From 2012 - 2016, the AHRC funded four Knowledge Exchange Hubs across the UK and several of the hubs supported collaborations between academics and the arts, cultural and creative sectors. The hubs included: REACT, Creativeworks London, Creative Exchange and Design in Action. Here is a [short video](#) of the launch of the four hubs.

[REACT](#) (2012-2016) incubated a number of projects in collaboration with numerous HEIs and arts organisations: University of the West of England, Watershed, University of Bath, University of Bristol, Cardiff University and the University of Exeter. Their goal was to prioritise pro-

cess and developing work from the ground up by engaging with audiences at early stages, rather than allowing funding to dictate the work. They developed KE laboratories for artists and researchers and documented the projects throughout the process, allowing for reports to be written and audiences to engage with the pieces at different stages in the development. These projects spanned literature, film, theatre, art, technology and others.

Type: Performances, Films, Hubs/Incubators/Networks, Installations, Publications

Theme: Technology

The AHRC funded [Creativeworks London](#) (2012 - 2016) supported over 100 collaborations between researchers and arts and creative organisations and practitioners, some of which are mentioned in this guide. The collaborations were supported under different schemes including: Creative Entrepreneur in Residence, Researcher in Residence, Creative Vouchers Scheme and a follow-on scheme called BOOST. It was a large partnership that brought together over 40 partners including many universities and cultural organisations including The British Library, The British Museum, Tate, V&A and BBC amongst others.

A blog platform, entitled [Widening the Register](#), was developed to largely support non-academic writing about the work.

Type: Performance, Film, Publications, Exhibitions, Festivals, Residencies & Internships, Conferences/Workshops/Events

Themes: Technology, Place-making, Health and Wellbeing, History / Conflict, Contemporary Culture and Society.

