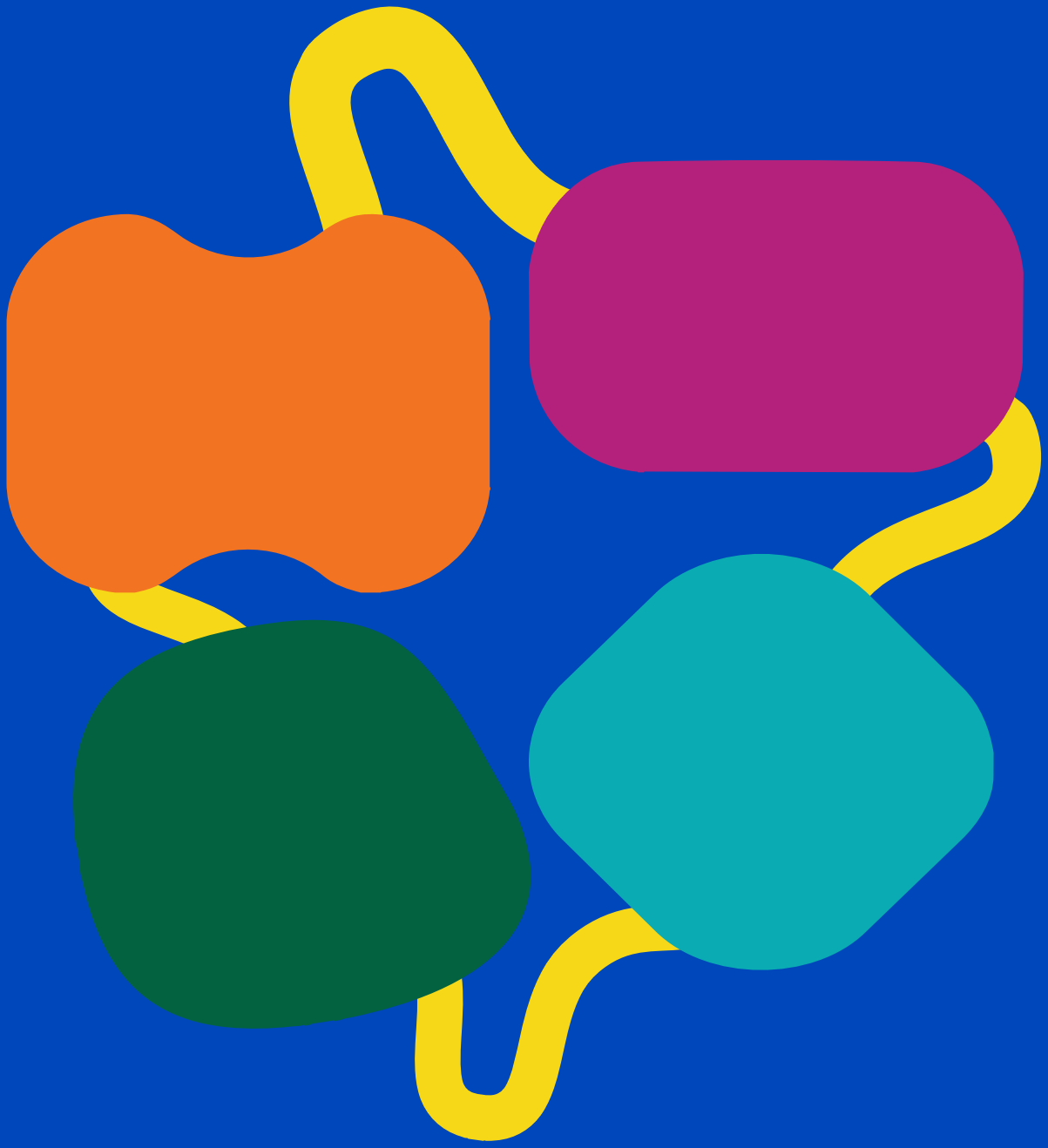
Arts Practitioner Research Framework

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National Centre for Academic and Cultural Exchange

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Introduction

Practitioners in the arts and cultural sector undertake research in many forms. They investigate ideas, test approaches, draw on embodied knowledge and lived experience, and respond to people and places. Through making, producing, performing, facilitating and collaborating, they develop new insights and ways of working. Yet this activity is not always recognised as research, either by institutions and funders or by practitioners themselves.

The NCACE Arts Practitioner Research Framework was developed in response to this gap, identified through our Independent Researcher Network (IRN). It supports practitioners to recognise, reflect on and communicate the research already present in their work. You can begin to use the framework straight away, but if you would like to learn more, follow the links provided for further background, explanations and examples.

The framework aims to make the knowledge within arts practice more visible: to practitioners themselves and to collaborators, communities, funders, universities and other partners. It starts from the principle that practitioners have their own rigorous and distinctive ways of investigating and making sense of the world. Academic language is not needed to validate that knowledge, and the framework does not ask practitioners to reshape their work to fit academic research models.

Making this research visible matters because practitioners often work across the arts, higher education, community settings, public services and the creative industries. They may move between roles as artists, producers, curators, facilitators, educators, consultants and researchers. The language available to describe their work does not always capture its complexity or the expertise that connects these roles.

A clearer account of practitioner research can strengthen professional confidence, support collaboration and create opportunities to contribute to wider research and knowledge-making. It can also challenge assumptions about where research happens, who is recognised as a researcher and what counts as a valuable research output.

Knowledge developed through practice may be embodied in skills and experience, shaped by a particular place or situation, or created collectively through relationships. It may be expressed through a performance, workshop, exhibition, conversation, process or new way of working. The framework helps practitioners recognise and describe these forms of knowledge without losing their richness.

Developing the Framework

The framework was developed through a process of testing, feedback and revision led by ‘Funmi Adewole-Elliott (PhD) and NCACE Co-director Suzie Leighton. ‘Funmi is an independent artist and researcher whose work spans academia and professional practice.

An open call to IRN members for volunteers to test the framework attracted strong interest. Six artists were selected: Andrea Queens, Briony Campbell, Toby Carr, Divya Kasturi, Ndidi Nkwopara and Rebekka Kill. ‘Funmi Adewole Elliott also tested the framework. The artists brought a range of art forms, cultural backgrounds, lived experiences and levels of familiarity with academic research. You can read their test frameworks here →

Their experiences shaped the guidance on using the framework. Their responses, available through the link, also offer examples of how the exercises can support inquiry into practice. The framework is now open to all independent researchers, and we welcome practitioners’ accounts of using it to inform further development.

Situating the Framework

The framework is itself a product of practitioner research, emerging from NCACE's work in knowledge exchange between higher education and the arts and cultural sectors. You can read the background context here →.

We use **arts practitioner research** as a working term for inquiry undertaken by artists and cultural practitioners, including curators and producers, through and in relation to their practice. This may happen independently, collaboratively or within an institution. Practitioner includes the varied circumstances of artistic careers: freelance, self-employed, voluntary, project-based and portfolio work, as well as formal employment.

Arts practice and research in universities have long developed alongside and influenced one another. The framework aims to support this continuing exchange, and we have given a brief overview of arts practitioner research here →.

The framework draws on practitioner research in education, healthcare and social work; social practice theory, which examines how activities are shaped by relationships and social settings; and arts practice research in universities. We have situated the framework within the relevant disciplinary fields here →.

These approaches help connect questions arising from everyday work with a deliberate process of investigation and reflection. Payam Sheikhattari et al. describe practitioner research as follows:

"*Practitioner research consists of empirical studies conducted by social workers, nurses, and other health professionals [or practitioners in other fields such as education] to answer questions resulting from their practices. The research takes place as an interaction between the practitioner doing the research and his or her colleagues, patients, or clients. The primary goal of practitioner research is to improve one's own practice*" (Sheikhattari et al., 2022, p. 2).

Action research is one approach used across these fields. It connects action with reflection through a cycle of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. It can underpin a large participatory project or a small study of an individual's work, such as teaching in a classroom. The arts practitioner research framework draws on this smaller-scale approach: investigating something within your practice, noticing what happens and using those insights to develop your work.

The framework adapts these approaches to the circumstances of artistic work. Artists enter practice through many routes: degrees and formal training, independent study,

learning with another artist, or cultural and community traditions. Professional identity therefore cannot be understood through qualifications or accreditation alone.

Artists also assess their work in different ways. Their research questions may arise from personal intentions, artistic goals, relationships with audiences, or exchanges with peers and collaborators. Cultural traditions, life experience and the communities they serve may shape their values and working methods. Reflection on identity is therefore central to the framework: it helps practitioners explain what informs their work, what they are trying to achieve and how they recognise its value.

How to use the Framework

There is no single correct way to use the framework. The exercises offer prompts for reflection and exploration, rather than a test, assessment or prescribed research method.

You can work through the whole framework, select the sections that feel most relevant or return to different exercises as your practice develops. You do not need to answer every question or produce a polished response. Some people may find it helpful to begin with their identity, values and ways of working. Others may prefer to start with a particular artwork, project or process and explore the wider questions from there.

If these kinds of exercises are new to you, we recommend following the numbered order. The concept-mapping exercise can feel challenging, but those who tested it also found it rewarding. The artists spent between 5 and 20 hours on the full set of exercises, depending on their experience and how deeply they chose to explore the questions. Allow yourself time to work at a useful pace.

Choose a form of response that helps you think. You might write in detail, make notes, draw a map, record yourself speaking, use images, or explore the questions through movement or conversation. Each offers a way to reflect on and communicate your experience.

Your responses can remain provisional. Practice changes, questions develop and new connections emerge. A practitioner research statement or process map can be a working document that you revisit and adapt, rather than a definitive account of who you are or how you work.

Some questions may feel immediately useful, while others may seem difficult, too broad or less relevant to your current concerns. It is fine to pause, move on or leave something unanswered. A difficult question may be worth returning to, but there is no expectation that every question must be resolved.

The purpose is to develop a clearer account of your work in your own terms, and to help you communicate it in different environments, including academic ones. You can repeat the exercises as your practice evolves. Recognising the knowledge in your practice is an important aim of framework, and here we give some examples of some of the forms of knowledge you may identify →.

An example of a completed arts practitioner research statement can be found here →.

Four Reflective Exercises step by step guide

These exercises are designed to help artists understand, document and communicate their practice. They can be completed separately and, in any order, but we recommend taking them in numbered order if you are new to doing these kinds of exercises.



Four Reflective Exercises at a glance



Exercise 1

ARTS PRACTITIONER SELF-SCOPING

Context

Artistic Practice can be understood as a social practice involving:

- what you make;
- how you make it;
- who you work with or for; and
- how the work is shared.

Knowledge may be generated at each of these points.

Before describing these practical aspects, it is important to identify what your practice means to you. Your identity, values and motivations give purpose to what you make and how you work.

Your practice is also shaped by artistic traditions, cultural contexts, training, communities and professional environments. Reflecting on these influences can help you understand the language you use to describe yourself and your work.

You may identify strongly with an artistic discipline, use a hybrid term such as "teaching artist", or change roles in different settings. Recognising these shifts can clarify how you work with others and what changes when you move between contexts.

Aim

To create a clear overview of:

- who you are as an artist;
- what shapes your practice;
- how your practice operates; and
- where knowledge arises within it.

Steps

Step 1: Identify your motivations and values

Complete these sentences:

- I make art because...
- My practice matters to me because...
- I want my work to...
- The values I try to protect are...
- I repeatedly return to...
- Choose three to five words that feel central to your practice.

Step 2: Describe your artistic identity

List the terms you use to describe yourself.

For example:

- artist;
- performer;
- writer;
- facilitator;
- musician;
- teaching artist;
- community artist;
- curator
- producer
- artist-researcher.

Ask:

- Which description feels most accurate?
- Does my role change in different settings?
- Are any terms given to me by organisations or funders?
- Do I have a core identity and several context-specific roles?

Step 3: Identify what has shaped your practice

List the main influences on your work.

These might include:

- artistic traditions;
- cultural heritage;
- training;
- communities;
- collaborators;
- places;
- technologies;
- professional sectors;
- political or ethical commitments.

For each major influence, note:

- what you have inherited;
- what you have adapted;
- what you have rejected or challenged.

Step 4: Map how your practice works

Use four boxes:

What I make	**How I make it**
Who I work with/for	**How the work is shared?**

Add specific examples to each box.

Step 5: Identify knowledge within your practice

For each box, ask:

- What have I learned through doing this?
- What do I understand through experience?
- What might another person learn from my approach?
- What remains difficult to explain?

ARTS PRACTITIONER SELF-SCOPING

OUTPUT
PRINT PAGE 13

Produce a one-page practice map containing:

Your key values

Your artistic identity

Your main influences

The four areas of your practice

Three things you know through practice

Back to top of document

Exercise 2

ARTS PROJECT PROCESS REFLECTION EXERCISE

Context

Artists often develop their own ways of working without formally naming them. They might be adapting inherited way of working or devising new ways of working as a result of the situations they are engaged with. Linda Candy and Ernest Edmonds describe these as "practitioner frameworks": structures created by practitioners to guide the development of their work (2011, p. 127).

Robert Nelson suggests that an artist can "attend to their work differently" by undertaking their practice as usual while paying closer attention to what happens, what decisions are made and what is learned (2022, p. 38).

This exercise uses a simple reflective cycle to make an existing process more visible.
Observe → Reflect → Identify a principle → Test again

Aim

To identify the process, decisions, and principles within a past or current project.

Steps

Step 1: Choose one project or artwork

Choose something specific:

- a completed artwork;
- a recent project;
- a work in progress; or
- one important stage of a larger project.

Write down:

- what you intended to do;
- who was involved;
- the main conditions or constraints;
- what was uncertain at the beginning.

Step 2: Create a simple timeline

Map the main stages of the work.

For example:

Initial idea
↓
Experiment
↓
Unexpected event
↓
Change of direction
↓
Final or current outcome

Include mistakes, pauses and changes, not only successful moments.

Step 3: Select three important moments

Choose three moments when something changed.

For each moment, answer:

- What happened?
- What did I do?
- Why did I respond in that way?
- What changed as a result?
- What did I learn?

Step 4: Look for repeated patterns

Ask:

- What did I do repeatedly?
- What did I pay attention to?
- How did I make decisions?
- How did I respond when the work became stuck?
- What did I protect or refuse to compromise?

Turn your answers into short working principles. For example:

- I begin by listening before proposing.
- I test ideas through making rather than planning.
- I change direction when the material resists the original idea.
- I keep part of the process open to collaborators.

Step 5: Describe your practitioner framework

Give your process three to six stages.

For example:

Listen → Gather → Experiment → Share → Reflect → Rework

For each stage, briefly note:

- what happens;
- who is involved;
- what the stage is intended to achieve.

Step 6: Identify one thing to test

Choose one principle or stage to try again in a future project.

Record:

- what you will repeat or change;
- what you will pay attention to;
- how you will document what happens.

ARTS PROJECT PROCESS REFLECTION EXERCISE

OUTPUT
PRINT PAGE 17

Produce a one-page practice framework containing:

A process diagram (Step 5)

Three to five working principles (Step 4)

One key insight

One question to test in future practice

Exercise 3
CONCEPT MAPPING

Context

Every artistic practice works with ideas drawn from artistic disciplines, cultural traditions, professional settings, communities, and academic fields. You can find useful language to describe your work by looking for the keywords and concepts that you use or relate to your work.

A keyword is a specific word or short phrase, the kind of term you would type into a library catalogue, database or search engine. A concept is wider: it is the underlying idea or theme behind your work, and it can be expressed in many different words. To explore one concept, you would usually use several keywords. Both are related and the difference between them is only mentioned because an understanding of this can facilitate how you look up information.

For example, a project about how people experience a city might connect to the concept of place, which you could search using keywords such as “site-specific”, “urban space”, “memory” and “belonging”. When concepts come from existing sources, their origins should be acknowledged. You may adopt them, adapt them, or challenge them. You may also find that no existing term adequately describes part of your practice. This may lead you to create a provisional working concept or identify an area for further exploration.

For simplicity we use the word ‘concept’ throughout this exercise. A good place to start is your own work: look for the words that keep recurring in your notes, proposals and descriptions of your practice. Grouping those keywords together will help you identify the concepts that are emerging and map out your areas of research interest and give you a shared language for conversations with academic collaborators.

Aim

To identify the key concepts surrounding your practice and clarify how you use them.

Steps

Step 1: Choose a central focus

Write one aspect of your practice in the centre of a page.

For example:

- collective listening;
- performance and memory;
- working with place;
- audience participation;
- art as a form of care.

Step 2: Add relevant concepts

Around the centre, add words and ideas connected to it.

Include:

- terms you use;
- terms collaborators use;
- ideas from your discipline;
- cultural or community concepts;
- institutional language;
- words you resist;
- things you cannot yet name.

Step 3: Group the concepts

Mark each concept as one of the following:

- Inherited: an established concept from a field or tradition.
- Adapted: an existing concept you use differently.
- Emergent: a concept arising from your own practice.
- Contested: a term you question or resist.

Step 4: Draw relationships

Connect concepts with labelled arrows.

For example:

Collective listening

- **enables → shared decision-making**
- **requires → trust**
- **challenges → individual authorship**

Use phrases such as:

- enables;
- depends on;
- challenges;
- produces;
- conflicts with;
- is shaped by.

Step 5: Define five key concepts

Choose five concepts that are especially important.

For each, write:

- what the concept means;
- where it comes from;
- how you use it;
- an example from your practice;
- what remains uncertain.

Step 6: Identify a gap or tension

Choose one thing that is difficult to name or one pair of concepts that conflict. Complete:

My practice values _____,

but it also requires _____.

Or create a provisional name for something that does not yet have an adequate label.

Mark it clearly as a working concept rather than a settled definition.

CONCEPT MAPPING

Produce one concept map containing:

Five key concepts

Their relationships

Their sources or contexts

One tension

One emerging or unnamed concept.

Exercise 4
ARTS PRACTITIONER RESEARCH STATEMENT

Context

This exercise brings together the findings from the other three exercises.

The aim is not to make every aspect of your practice clear or to present it as academic research. It is to create a useful account of:

- what your practice is concerned with;
- how you work;
- what contexts shape the work;
- what knowledge or insight emerges; and
- what remains unresolved.

Uncertainty, intuition, and mystery can remain part of the statement.

Aim

To create a concise account of your practice as a form of inquiry.

Steps

Step 1: Identify the center of your practice

Complete:

- My practice is concerned with...
- I am repeatedly drawn to...
- I make work in order to explore...
- The work matters because...

Use these answers to write two or three sentences.

Step 2: Write your current question

Write one central question that your practice is exploring.

For example:

- How can performance create space for different forms of memory?
- What happens when participants are able to redirect an artwork?
- How might material experimentation reveal knowledge that cannot be planned in advance?

The question can remain open.

Step 3: Describe how you work

Summarise your process in a short paragraph.

Include:

- how projects begin;
- your main methods;
- who or what you work with;
- how decisions are made;
- how reflection affects the work.

Step 4: Name the contexts and concepts

List the most important:

- artistic traditions;
- cultural contexts;
- professional fields;
- communities;
- concepts;
- writers, artists or other influences.

Only include those that actively shape the practice.

Step 5: Describe the knowledge or insight

Complete:

- Through making, I have learned...
- My practice helps me attend to...

- The process creates insight into...
- This insight may be useful to...
- Its limits are...

Distinguish between what you know, what you suspect and what remains uncertain.

Step 6: Include collaboration and responsibility

Briefly explain:

- who is involved;
- what your role is;
- how decisions or authorship are shared;
- what ethical responsibilities shape the work.

Step 7: Record what remains open

Create a section called:

What I do not yet know

Include:

- unanswered questions;
- tensions;
- limitations;
- mysteries;
- areas you may return to later.

Step 8: Assemble a short statement

Use this structure:

- My practice
- My central question
- How I work
- Contexts and concepts
- Knowledge and insight
- Collaboration and responsibility
- What remains unresolved

Aim initially for 300–500 words.

ARTS PRACTITIONER RESEARCH STATEMENT

OUTPUT
PRINT PAGE 25

Produce:

A one-sentence description of your practice

A 300–500-word practitioner research statement

Three open questions

One area you may explore next

An arts practitioner research statement is here →

Conclusion

We hope you find the framework insightful and useful. It is here to help you see the wider conversations your work belongs to, bring the processes you have developed into view and share what your practice has taught you. The aim is not to turn artists into academics. It is to offer tools for engaging with theory on your own terms, strengthening your practice and moving confidently between different professional settings. We have adapted action research to the realities of artistic practice so that the framework stays simple and flexible, and so that you can return to it whenever you need to.

Artistic and academic careers are increasingly precarious, freelance and spread across sectors, which makes it more important than ever to be able to understand, document and talk about what you do. We hope the framework supports you in sustaining a practice that is reflective, rigorous and defined by you.

We are keen to hear your experience of interacting with the framework, in our minds it should evolve with and be shaped by practice. If you would like to share your insights, please contact the NCACE team.

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The Artists who Tested the Framework

Andrea Queens

Artistic Practice

Andrea Queens' artistic practice sits at the intersection of music, poetry, movement, sound, and participatory arts. She works as a singer-songwriter, choreographer, poet, facilitator, producer, and creative practitioner, creating spaces where artistic expression, wellbeing, and collective reflection meet. Her work spans performance, community engagement, creative health, and socially engaged practice, ranging from sound baths and theatrical works to multidisciplinary exhibitions and collaborative arts programmes.

Across these contexts, she explores care, rest, voice, and connection as artistic practices, and is interested in how creative spaces can support people to reconnect with themselves, one another, and forms of knowledge often overlooked within outcome-driven environments. Much of her work centres lived experience, embodied wisdom, and collective meaning-making, particularly with women and communities whose voices are often underrepresented.

Inquiry

What Andrea sensed she knew through her practice but could not fully articulated, is how artistic processes create the conditions for people to access knowledge that is felt before it is spoken. Through years of working across disciplines and sectors, she has developed ways of holding creative spaces that foster trust, reflection, expression, and insight. She recognises that a methodology connects her work as an artist, facilitator, producer, and community practitioner, but is still searching for language that adequately describes it.

She is particularly interested in understanding how rest can function as a creative practice, how care can operate as an artistic methodology, and how voice can become a tool for collective reflection and transformation. She would welcome the opportunity to better articulate, document, and communicate these forms of embodied and relational knowledge while retaining their complexity, humanity, and cultural specificity.

Feedback after testing the NCACE Arts practitioner research framework

Andrea found that her understanding of her own journey became clearer through the process of testing the framework, giving her a stronger sense of direction even where outcomes remain somewhat open. She found that her use of certain terminology feels more

grounded and anchored and that she has become more aware of what she wants to develop further. It has helped her make decisions with greater confidence.

Through the process, she recognised that she is, and has been, working as a Creative and Wellbeing Consultant. She is now able to pinpoint what that means in practice and how it shapes her creative and leadership processes, potentially opening up new income opportunities. She feels better able to identify what she brings and can sustain throughout and after a project. Additionally, she is encouraged to work in more fields of research and investigate what arts thinking can contribute within and beyond artistic projects. She described feeling more comfortable collaborating alongside experts without needing to master their craft herself, recognising that her focus lies in accessing what is felt such as the messages sent and received through the act of making art.

Briony Campbell

Artistic practice

Briony Campbell is an award-winning collaborative artist and creative facilitator with over fifteen years' experience working across arts, education, health and research contexts. She takes on multiple roles within projects, including lead or co-lead artist, facilitator of others' creativity, and artist responder to existing research.

Her academic collaborators and commissioners have included UCL's Trellis programme, the University of Birmingham, and Queen's University Belfast. Her work has been supported by the AHRC, Arts Council England, and the Templeton Foundation, and she has collaborated with neuroscientists, psychologists, sociologists, healthcare practitioners and fellow artists.

The aims of these commissions range from knowledge exchange across disciplines to supporting non-artists in expressing lived experience and increasing public engagement with complex subjects.

Her projects have explored intercultural relationships, grief, neurodiversity and parenthood, usually through interdisciplinary collaboration. Most recently, her work with UCL's Professor Natalie Ryan and families affected by familial Alzheimer's disease deepened her interest in the relationship between emotional, experiential and scientific forms of knowledge.

Inquiry

Briony had become increasingly concerned with articulating the knowledge her projects generate. Although the different strands of her practice are deeply connected, she found it difficult to describe what these unique processes collectively produce without reducing their complexity. Her collaborations generate rich relational and emotional knowledge

through trust, shared storytelling and iterative artmaking, but she could not fully articulate how her skills and approaches equip her to work effectively across sectors. Developing a research profile that genuinely reflects what she creates through collaboration feels to her both timely and important.

Feedback after testing the NCACE Arts practitioner researcher framework:

As someone who generally learns through experience rather than study, she found the approach offered by the framework well suited to her. She found the exercises, particularly concept mapping exercise, an interesting and immediate way to begin thinking about her practice in relation to theoretical discourses. The exercises helped Briony think about the influences on her practice.

Additionally, the exercises confirmed that she has a good grasp of what she aims to do within a project and that she understands how to be responsive to achieve strong outcomes. They also highlighted to her areas where there was more knowledge that she could gain by learning from others, both formally and informally and prompted in her a wish to explore subjects relevant to her work in greater depth.

Toby Carr

Artistic practice

Toby Carr is a lute player and guitarist working in the field of historically informed performance, active as a performer, teacher and researcher. His particular interest lies in English lute music of the mid-seventeenth century, a repertoire for which sources are few and fragmentary. He is exploring ways of bringing underexplored and forgotten performance styles into the present day, using artistic research to creatively fill gaps in the historical record. In his work, a great deal of contextual and background information must be communicated before the more distinctive and interesting aspects of his practice can be shared and finding a more effective and efficient way to do this is one of his aims which he hoped this framework might help him address.

Inquiry

Central to Toby's work is the act of playing the music. It sits at the centre of his research inquiry. He believes that being guided by the act of playing existing but underexplored repertoire, and by generating new repertoire for his instrument from other surviving material, he will enter into unusual and exciting territory. He was keen to find guidance on how best to communicate this to the wider community.

Feedback after testing the NCACE Arts practitioner-researcher framework:

Toby found the process helpful in clarifying how he thinks about his work, particularly in

relation to the somewhat different roles he occupies across different areas of his life. The exercises helped him articulate the points of tension and interest at the heart of his practice which includes pin-pointing his contribution as an artist in a field which is focuses on bringing together the scholarship of others. He looks forward to revisiting the framework as his artistic research evolves.

Divya Kasturi

Artistic practice

Divya Kasturi's artistic practice sits at the intersection of classical South Asian performance, music, technology, education, and interdisciplinary collaboration. As a performer, choreographer, vocalist, educator, curator, and researcher, she moves fluidly between multiple contexts; from theatres, festivals, museums, and digital platforms to conservatoires, community spaces, and international cultural exchanges.

Rooted in Bharatanatyam and Carnatic music, her practice is informed by more than three decades of performance experience and a lifelong engagement with embodied knowledge systems. Alongside presenting traditional repertoire, she creates contemporary and interdisciplinary works that bring classical forms into dialogue with theatre, film, immersive technologies, and new audiences. Her projects have explored virtual reality, 3D holographic performance, dance film, and interactive experiences, extending the possibilities of how South Asian classical arts can be experienced, transmitted, and reimagined.

As an educator and curator, she works across professional, academic, and community settings, fostering meaningful encounters between tradition and innovation. Whether mentoring young artists, teaching at conservatoires, or leading international collaborations, she is interested in how artistic knowledge is inherited, adapted, and shared across generations and cultures.

Inquiry

What Divya sensed through her practice but had not fully articulated, is the capacity of classical forms to function as living technologies of connection. Beyond preservation or innovation, she is increasingly drawn to how embodied practices carry memory, ancestry, emotion, and cultural intelligence across time. Her work continually returns to questions of presence, belonging, and transformation: how traditions evolve without losing their essence, how technology can deepen rather than distance human experience, and how performance can create spaces where heritage and future-making coexist. It is within this intersection that her current artistic and research enquiry resides.

Feedback after testing the NCACE Arts practitioner research framework

Divya found the exercises engaging and thought-provoking. They challenged her to look at her work through unfamiliar viewpoints and prompting fresh ways of expressing, describing, and analysing her practice. For the first time, she encountered the possibility that a practitioner's work might hold validity within a research context. She particularly valued Howard Becker's theorisation of "art worlds," which was introduced to her through the framework which was valuable given her own position within cultural and community settings and supportive of her efforts to demonstrate that such that work in these settings holds its own alongside the mainstream.

Having often been told that the diversity of the fields she works in can make her practice appear confusing, she described the exercises as revelatory in helping her identify a common thread running through her diverse strands of work. Two of the shifts in language she embraced included framing music as an "inner architecture," and "technology as an extension of embodiment". The process also led her to undertake a value-proposition session, which further sharpened her ability to reflect on and articulate her practice.

Ndidi Nkwopara

Artistic practice

Ndidi Nkwopara's artistic practice sits at the intersection of cultural production, community development, and African diasporic arts. As a creative producer and founder of the Leeds International African Arts Festival (LIAAF), she works across a range of roles, including curator, programmer, facilitator, and strategic lead. Her work takes place across community settings, cultural institutions, and public spaces, often bringing together artists, audiences, and partners to co-create experiences that centre African and diaspora narratives.

She also works beyond the arts, particularly in the fields of wellbeing, social impact, and community empowerment, designing and delivering projects that respond to questions of representation, access, and collective healing, while creating platforms for underrepresented voices. Alongside her creative work, she is involved in shaping partnerships, developing funding strategies, and building programmes that hold both artistic and social value.

Inquiry

Ndidi was aware that her practice produces a form of embodied and relational knowledge about how culture can be used to build connection, strengthen identity, and support transformation. She, however, had not yet fully articulated her framework. Much of Ndidi's practice was intuitive: how she brings people together, how she holds space, and how she

translates ideas across different contexts and sectors. She was interested in developing a clearer language for her practice, one that reflects both the strategic thinking and the lived, human experience at the core of her work.

Feedback after testing the NCACE Arts practitioner-researcher framework

Through the four reflective exercises, Ndidi's understanding and language became more focused and confident. While the exercises did not reveal anything entirely new to her, they did clarify her mode of practice, helping her articulate and document her process more clearly. As a result, she further developed her artist statement and used it in a recent funding application, demonstrating how reflection directly supports professional development. The framework now feels to her like a useful reference and teaching document that could support her successors.

Rebekka Kill

Artistic practice

Rebekka's practice has shifted from painting, writing and performance towards floristry and illustration. She now spends approximately half of her week engaged in creative practice; the most creatively productive period she has experienced in thirty years. She worked for many years as an academic. Within her work she occupies multiple roles simultaneously: artist, maker, designer, illustrator, florist, teacher, coach and writer. She also works across in various contexts; domestic, commercial and artistic contexts, often moving between commissioned illustration, floral installation, temporary sculptural arrangements and more conceptual creative enquiry. Increasingly she finds herself working in spaces that sit between art, craft and design rather than comfortably inside any single category.

Inquiry

What Rebekka sensed through her practice but had not fully articulated, is that floristry operates as a serious form of visual and spatial thinking, despite rarely being recognised as such. Floristry is often dismissed as decorative craft or commercial labour and thereby positioned beyond the boundaries of contemporary art practice. She found however that floristry drew on many of the same skills she utilised in painting and performance such as composition, colour theory, spatial awareness, storytelling, intuition, curiosity and meaning making. Her work with flowers involves constructing temporary sculptural forms and wearable art, and responding to colour, texture, space, form, balance and ephemera.

She is increasingly interested in why illustration is granted greater cultural legitimacy while floristry remains associated with femininity, domesticity and service. Her practice

appears to produce an ongoing critique of how creative labour is valued and categorised. Opposed to focussing on the divisions between fine art, design and applied practice, she understands them as interconnected forms of material and visual communication.

Feedback after testing the NCACE Arts practitioner research framework

Rebekka answered the exercises in the framework twice, in relation to different aspects of her working life. She found used in this manner the framework revealed insights specific to each context she works in. Her framework which she calls 'Floral thinking' was developed through her industry practice. She is keen to bring it into dialogue with academic discourses. Using the framework, led her into discovering a theoretical field around artistic practice involving flowers and has enabled her to situate her practice more effectively.

'Funmi Adewole-Elliott

Artistic Practice

'Funmi Adewole Elliott's artistic practice, Ṣeré Kinaesthetic, is a dramaturgically driven creative practice with a focus on performance making. It sits at the intersection of storytelling and choreography. She works as a performer-researcher, as well as a teacher, writer, dramaturg and facilitator. She creates solo performances that combine narrative and movement, as well as pedagogical methods and compositions for higher education, conservatoires and community settings.

At the centre of her practice are the spectrums of storytelling and dance. These run from everyday telling and gesture to stylised forms of narration and dance for the stage and social occasions. Rooted in African dance drama and informed by physical theatre, contemporary choreography and somatic inquiry, her work explores what can be communicated where these spectrums overlap. She situates this Africanist practice within professional performance to contribute to the decolonising of knowledge production in dance and theatre.

Inquiry

Funmi knows that her practice relies on dramaturgical thinking: thinking across movement and storytelling practices to shape how meaning is made where they meet. She can see it at work in how her pieces are structured, as they move between direct address, storytelling, stylised dance and narrative. What she cannot yet fully articulate is her way of working. Her approaches come from years of working in theatre and dance as a performer, teacher, researcher and organiser. She wants to make the role of dramaturgy in her practice more concrete so that it can be shared with others, while keeping its roots in lived experience and its Africanist, translocal and transnational character.

Feedback after testing the NCACE Arts practitioner research framework

Working with the framework led Funmi to recognise and identify the concepts and processes that drive her practice dramaturgically. The spectrums of storytelling and dance stood out, and she began to be able to articulate the criteria behind her choices as to how she might move between these spectrums. Doing the exercises has revealed the areas she now needs to investigate in order to develop her practice further. She now has both a language for this aspect of her practice and a map of where to take it next .

Background and Context

The National Centre for Academic and Cultural Exchange (NCACE) supports more effective, equitable and sustainable knowledge exchange and collaboration between higher education and the arts and cultural sectors. As part of this wider work, NCACE has sought to understand and strengthen the role of independent researchers: people who undertake research outside conventional university structures and whose knowledge, methods and professional experience can make an important contribution to collaboration across academic, cultural and community contexts. The NCACE report *A Community of Practice for Independent Researchers: Scoping NCACE's Independent Researchers Network* marked the launch of the Independent Researchers Network (IRN) in 2025. It set out the rationale for the Network and identified a series of questions for its members to explore collectively.

The IRN was established as a community of practice through which independent researchers could connect with one another, share knowledge and experience, identify common challenges and develop the language, resources and forms of support needed to strengthen independent research. A network-mapping exercise undertaken during the establishment of the IRN identified significant differences in the support available to different groups of independent researchers. Independent scholars and community researchers can draw on several established networks, methodologies and professional frameworks. Independent artists and creative practitioners, however, often undertake substantial research through their professional practice without necessarily describing, documenting or communicating it as research.

Many artists and creative practitioners already undertake forms of independent and professional inquiry. Nevertheless, the language, methods and professional discourse surrounding arts practitioner research remain comparatively underdeveloped. Some infrastructure does exist to support this research, including Arts Council England's Developing Your Creative Practice programme and professional development schemes offered by organisations such as Artsadmin and People Dancing. However, there remains no widely shared language, framework or culture through which artists can identify and articulate the research embedded in their practice. Research in artistic contexts is usually considered simply part of the process of making or presenting art, rather than something distinct.

However, the context for artistic practice has evolved. The decision to develop an arts practitioner research framework is in response to significant changes across the academic,

arts and cultural sectors. Employment has become increasingly precarious, and academic careers are beginning to resemble artistic careers in their reliance on freelance, self-employed and portfolio-based work. At the same time, opportunities for artists to work within higher education are contracting, alongside reductions in other sources of funding and paid employment. These developments place new demands on artists and academics at a time when both may have access to less institutional and infrastructural support.

Artists have always needed to respond to briefs, collaborate with others and communicate their ideas through applications, commissions and professional relationships. However, the changing conditions of work across the arts, culture and higher education now place greater emphasis on their ability to take intellectual and professional ownership of their practice. Artistic work is also increasingly situated within cross-sectoral contexts, drawing on and contributing to areas such as technology, healthcare, education, creative facilitation and producing. Although such interdisciplinary working is not new, it has become a more visible and significant part of many contemporary artistic careers. A clear understanding of their own positionality can help artists navigate these settings, articulate the principles informing their work and distinguish their contribution from that of their collaborators. In this evolving environment, artists increasingly need to be able to explain not only what they make or do, but also the knowledge, methods, values and forms of expertise that underpin their practice, and the value it can bring to artistic, academic, cultural, community and cross-sectoral contexts.

A practitioner research framework can provide artists with a structured means of reflecting on their practice and generating an evidence base for its development. This is increasingly important because funders and commissioners often require systematic monitoring, reflection and evaluation. Practitioner research can help artists document their methods, assess what has been learned and demonstrate the development and impact of their work. It may also provide a foundation for future academic study and support the preparation of funding proposals, project plans and professional statements across different sectors.

The purpose of the framework is therefore to offer artists a simple, accessible and useful means of developing the discursive context of their practice, foregrounding the processes they have created and articulating the insights their work can generate. Its aim is not to turn artists into academics or to require them to adopt academic modes of working. Rather, it enables arts practitioners to engage selectively and critically with relevant theories and concepts in ways that strengthen their practice while remaining grounded in practitioner inquiry. To achieve this, established approaches to practitioner and action research must be adapted to reflect the distinctive conditions of artistic practice, including the varied ways in which artists develop their identities, methods, values, professional relationships and criteria for evaluating their work.

The framework also responds to questions of ownership, recognition and equity within knowledge exchange. During IRN meetings, artists have described feeling "left behind" when collaborations with academics come to an end. They may struggle to articulate what they contributed to a partnership, what knowledge was generated through their practice or how the collaboration has influenced their subsequent work. Some have also described seeing their work represented in academic research outputs without being named or adequately acknowledged. The NCACE report *Artists and Creative Practitioners Working with Higher Education* (NCACE, 2026) further highlights the importance of supporting artists and creative practitioners to participate fully and equitably in knowledge exchange. Supporting artists to identify and communicate their own research processes can help address these imbalances. It can enable them to enter collaborations with a clearer understanding of their knowledge, methods and intellectual contribution, to retain a stronger sense of ownership over the work they undertake, and to recognise the value they bring to partnerships. This, in turn, can increase the quality of collaboration between the academic and cultural sectors. The development of the arts practitioner research framework was led by NCACE Associate, 'Funmi Adewole Elliott who has developed her own creative practice through practitioner inquiry. She also has many years of designing and delivering professional development programmes, teaching in further education and supervising research projects in Higher education.

A Brief Overview of Arts Practitioner Research

Professional practice and academic research in dialogue

Professional arts practice and academic arts research in the UK have developed alongside one another and remain in dialogue, although their outputs often address different audiences and serve different purposes. From the 1990s onwards, practice research has been championed within universities by academics who seek to establish artistic practice as a mode of inquiry in its own right and to develop new forms of research that integrated creative processes. Reflective practice is also embedded in arts training, through both reflection on practice and reflection in practice.

This academic intervention was itself informed by artistic practice beyond the university. Arts movements in Britain have long been shaped by experimentation, research and the development of new practices in both professional and academic contexts, with practitioners in each field collaborating and drawing on one another's expertise. Academics have studied artistic movements and individual artists, generating a critical context for the arts, while arts practitioners have drawn on academic knowledge to theorise their work.

Movements that shaped practice

Between the 1940s and the 1970s, Joan Littlewood led significant innovations in theatre, while the growth of the community arts movement from the 1970s onwards saw practitioners develop new participatory approaches to artistic creation. The British Black Arts Movement of the 1980s, led by Black and Asian artists, contributed to the establishment of Black-led and Asian-led arts organisations. These organisations shaped the context of professional arts practice for people of global majority heritage in Britain and subsequently influenced how artistic practices are taught and researched in universities.

Funding and support for artist-led research

As the Arts Council broadened its remit, it began to support artists' self-directed professional development through funding for research, travel and experimentation. During the 1990s, the Arts Council's International Arts Fellowships encouraged developmentin the arts by enabling artists to travel, collaborate with international partners, gain new experiences and develop their skills. More recently, Arts Council England has continued this tradition through its Developing Your Creative Practice grants.

Arts support organisations have also supported research as a form of professional development. The Association of Dance of the African Diaspora (ADAD), among others, provided sustained support for artists; its Trailblazers Fellowship, which ran from 2003 to 2017, enabled artists to develop and extend their practices.

Publications, networks and practice across sectors

Professional associations and publications have likewise contributed to the development of practitioner-led knowledge. Magazines such as Animated gave community dance practitioners opportunities to reflect on and disseminate their work, while academic journals dedicated to pedagogy published accounts of teaching practice by artists across a range of disciplines. As artists increasingly work across sectors, a growing body of literature has emerged that addresses artistic practice beyond the stage or gallery, in areas such as arts in health, artistic citizenship, socially engaged arts and the work of the teaching artist.

A broad ecology of knowledge

This brief overview suggests that knowledge in the arts is generated across a broad ecology of settings rather than within any single institution. Artists develop knowledge through making, teaching, collaboration, reflection, publication, professional networks and engagement with communities. Artistic practice can therefore be understood not simply in terms of individual works or isolated acts of creativity, but as a socially situated activity embedded in wider systems of relationships and exchange. The arts practitioner research framework is designed to encourage artists to reflect on their practice from this perspective and, in doing so, to develop a conceptual context for their work.

Situating the Arts Practitioner Research Framework within Disciplinary Fields

The framework draws on three fields: social practice theory; action research, which is used in both professional and academic contexts; and arts practice research. It is also informed by Paulo Freire's theory of praxis.

Social practice theory: artistic practice as a social activity

Social practice theory is concerned with the routine, shared ways in which human activities are organised and sustained through habits, skills, materials, tools and social norms. Rooted in this theory, the framework defines artistic practice in terms of how it emerges, is reproduced and is transformed in social contexts. The theory has informed the study of the arts in a range of fields, including critical dance studies, Black performance studies and Howard Becker's theorisation of art worlds. It allows artistic practice to be understood in relation to the wider ecosystems that sustain it, rather than solely through its products.

This makes social practice theory particularly appropriate for practitioner research, because it enables arts practitioners to attend to the relationships between the processes, environments, audiences and communities through which artistic knowledge is generated.

Practitioner inquiry and Freire's praxis: reflection and action

Many arts practitioners whose artistic and cultural forms are only beginning to be taught in Higher Education have carried out research within their professional practice beyond academic contexts. Accounts of this kind of inquiry are more often found in professional journals and newsletters than in scholarly literature. One such example is *The Practice Behind the 'Practice'*, an article by Vicki Igbokwe, choreographer and founder of Uchenna Dance which outlines how she developed her practice. Supported by a Trailblazers award, Igbokwe travelled to New York in 2008, where she trained in House, Waacking and Vogue and came to understand these as social dances rooted in the club cultures, histories and communities that produced them. In 2009 she founded her company. Her dancers prompted her to develop a new warm-up routine to replace the traditional contemporary dance warm-ups she was using and which sat uneasily with the new vocabulary she had developed. She left her job as Creative Projects Manager for East London Dance to continue developing her practice. She spent a year building the foundations of the new movement vocabulary, that drew on her nearly two decades of training, followed by four

years of refinement. The result was the Uchenna/Igbokwe Technique: a practice robust enough to be shared through both education and performance (Igbokwe, 2020).

Paulo Freire's theorisation of praxis as 'reflection and action' directed towards 'a transformation of the world' (Freire, 2000) is also useful here, particularly for artists working from postcolonial arts contexts.

Igbokwe's method was itself a cycle of action and reflection: each week she brought new exercises into the studio, taught them, sought her dancers' responses, adjusted, taught again and worked with the outcomes.

Crucially, Freire rejects the 'banking concept of education', in which students are treated as passive 'receptacles' of knowledge and conditioned to reproduce the world as they find it (Freire, 2000, p. 83). This model, he argues, establishes the coloniser's worldview as the standard, turning learners away from reflecting on their own circumstances and from seeking solutions suited to their own aspirations.

Freire's perspective therefore values artistic practices that have emerged from overlooked contexts and that incorporate aesthetics which matter to the artist but may not yet be theorised in scholarship.

Action research

Action research undertaken by individual practitioners is also known as practitioner inquiry, and it is often used in educational settings. A teacher might, for example, notice low student engagement during group work. In response, they design a new discussion strategy and introduce it in class. They then collect data, which might consist of observations of how students engage with the new strategy, together with student feedback. The teacher reflects by comparing responses to the new strategy with responses to the previous one and adjusts their approach considering these findings. They may then repeat the cycle, exploring and testing further approaches.

Such a project requires only that the teacher embed the research inquiry in a lesson plan and test it by teaching the class, with the usual opportunities for feedback during the class providing the evaluation. The outcome, however, enables the teacher to improve their practice.

What makes this example bona fide research, rather than simply good practice, is that it is grounded in triangulation. Triangulation involves drawing on three perspectives (those of the teacher, the learners and a colleague) and examining the activity under investigation at three stages: before, during and after the lesson. These perspectives and stages are supported by multiple sources of evidence, including lesson plans and notes, learners' work, records of learner feedback and colleagues' comments. Together, these elements create a credible, triangulated account of events, enabling the practitioner to develop a

deeper understanding of the complex nature of learners' experiences (The Education and Training Foundation, 2021).

Such projects are often underpinned by Donald Schön's concepts of 'reflection-on-action', in which insights are drawn out after the event by working through the stages of a reflective cycle, and 'reflection-in-action', in which insights are noticed while the event is taking place; these may be recorded in a journal and analysed afterwards.

Practice research and Informed Critical Inquiry

The framework also draws on Informed Critical Inquiry (Nelson, 2022, p. 48), an established mode of academic artistic research, to support artists in drawing language, ideas and knowledge from a range of disciplines and sectors. Reflective practices, including journalling, are part of most university arts degrees and are usually central to practice research degrees. Reflective practice supports the process of making tacit knowledge explicit, helping insights and practitioner frameworks to find the language and form that make them shareable.

Engaging with the language and concepts of the disciplines or fields in which they work can help arts practitioners put into words how they are using, developing or departing from established knowledge, and so articulate what their work is and what it does. Academic disciplines and fields of practice, whether cultural or professional, provide shared language and frameworks that an artist can adapt to express their own thinking and approaches. Texts in which these concepts are discussed should be cited in line with good academic practice.

An artist may also find that they are using concepts they cannot find in the established literature. They could label these 'working' or 'provisional' concepts and develop them over time.

Three modes of knowing: know-how, know-what and know-that

There are various ways of describing knowledge from different cultural and disciplinary perspectives. An accessible framework from practice research describes knowledge from artistic practice know-how, know-what and know-that. Most artistic work appears to focus on know-how and know-what. Know-how is often embodied in practice or training. Know-what is tacit knowledge made explicit through critical reflection: it emerges when practitioners reflect critically on their know-how in order to translate it, partially but never completely, into something resembling know-that, which is explicit, communicable knowledge (Nelson, 2022, pp. 44–48). The three modes summarised below.

Know-how: The practical, embodied competence developed through doing and practising, often alongside others and frequently within formal training contexts. It remains fundamentally tacit and located in embodied cognition, even though reflection can make aspects of it visible. Know-how is built through a cycle that includes reading or research before practice and critical reflection afterwards, but it develops essentially through discovery in being and doing: learning by enacting the practice, not merely by thinking or writing about it beforehand.

Know-what: The tacit dimension of practice made explicit through critical reflection. This could involve articulating what works; naming and breaking into stages the methods used to make an artwork; identifying which principles of composition were used, what effects were achieved and what is distinctive about the practice. It is the practitioner's own embodied knowledge, surfaced and named through reflective analysis rather than knowledge imposed from outside.

Know-that: Explicit, propositional knowledge. It is knowledge that can be stated as objective fact, represented mathematically or numerically, or formulated as rules and laws written in the passive voice. It is associated with knowledge of objects viewed 'from a distance', detached and ostensibly value-free. Crucially, know-that is distinct from, and cannot fully capture, tacit, embodied modes of knowing. Practitioners often resist full translation into this form because, as the saying goes, 'if they could write it, they would not need to animate, paint, perform or construct'.

Recognising the Knowledge in your Practice

The four exercises are designed to help you with identifying, naming and describing the knowledge your artistic practice produces. That knowledge might appear in several forms. Examples are given below. This is not an exhaustive list:

- **Context**: A context for your artistic practice that emerges from specific social, cultural, disciplinary and personal intersections.
- **Ethics**: Insights in how to work in ways which safeguard certain concerns and people.
- Imagination: How investigating unknowable topics with imagination produces knowledge, artistic practices and art works.
- **Subject insight**: Fresh perspective or insight into a subject area, such as social history or a public figure or scientific idea arising from the research used to create an artwork or develop a practice.
- **A practitioner framework**: An account of your process of making, teaching, performing, or staging work, facilitating and so on.
- **Deepened use of a known framework or technique**: More detailed insight into how to use or apply an established or recognised artistic framework or technique.
- **An adapted framework**: A framework drawn from a non-artistic discipline and adapted for use in your artistic practice, the changes made to the non-artistic framework and what these produce when used in artistic practice.
- **Insight through a lens**: Insight into how your artistic practice is produced, gained by looking at your work through a particular concept or lens, how this lens inspires approaches, processes and exercises and such the like.
- **Insight through displacement**: Insight gained from using known techniques or forms outside their usual circumstances or with different groups of people.
- **Working concepts**: New insights that emerge through their work which the practitioner might give a name.

Arts Practitioner Statement Example

‘Funmi Adewole-Elliott:
ARTS PRACTITIONER RESEARCH STATEMENT

Ṣeré Kinaesthetic is my dramaturgically and research-informed creative practice, focused on performance making and its processes. By dramaturgical thinking, I mean thinking across movement and storytelling practices to shape how meaning is made where they meet. The foundation of my practice is in African dance drama, through which I came to understand story and dance as each existing on a spectrum. It articulates an Africanist practice from within a transnational professional performance context, supporting the decolonising of knowledge production in dance and theatre.

At the heart of my inquiry is the question: how can dramaturgical thinking across the spectrums of storytelling and dance deepen communication and empathy between performer and audience? Alongside this, I am interested in how the practice can support people’s wellbeing through difficult transitions, how it can carry the knowledge of a generation living through postcolonial conditions into the future, and how lived experience across translocal and transnational contexts can become a source of method, not only of content.

My projects begin with a story I wish to tell, or with an artistic journey organised for others to a clear brief. I research the situation, take inventory of my skills and materials, and draw on methods built up over many years. I then explore which mode should lead (persona, shape or dynamic) and make the piece, evaluating it with outside eyes where possible and returning to earlier stages until it is complete. Throughout, decisions are filtered through the clarity of the story or journey.

I describe my practice as both Africanist and Transnational. My work draws on post-independence African cultural production in terms of its praxis: African dance drama and theatre, neotraditional creative dance, the Heinemann African Writers Series. I am inspired by the work of the first generation of modern and contemporary African choreographers, such as Germaine Acogny, Zab Maboungou, Peter Badejo and Francis Nii Yartey. My work is also informed by Brenda Dixon Gottschild’s concept of Africanist dance aesthetics, the New Dance movement in the UK, postmodern contemporary choreographic practices, contact improvisation, somatic inquiry, and physical theatre approaches to creating performance.

Through making, I have learned that work must be considered in relation to its context. My pedagogy comes from my performance making, and in performance I constantly gather audience feedback and aim to make work that is relatable. The practice helps me attend to the everyday, my social reality and the wellbeing of those I work with. Students report learning storytelling and dramaturgical skills, and gaining confidence in developing choreography from a range of movement practices. I also use the practice in health and wellbeing contexts, and it suits performance that values narrative.

I am currently the sole author of my work. I see myself as part of artist networks such as Pan-African Creative Exchange and Kauma Arts, to which I contribute, and when I do engage in collaborations, I request written agreements or terms of engagement to suit our working together.

My work is research informed. I am presently investigating how I use dramaturgical decisions from one artistic context or work setting to another. What remains unresolved is how to explain the connection between the ways I work across these different fields. Finding language to facilitate practice is one of my research interests.

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