

Artists Networks: Whose Voice Counts?

Researching the disconnects with and for artists from the Global Majority in the Yorkshire region.



WRoCAH funded Collaborative Doctoral Award between School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies at the University of Leeds and Yorkshire & Humber Visual Arts Network

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Project summary

This project will collaboratively examine approaches to the critical absence of research on the involvement of artists from the Global Majority within artist-led networks in the Yorkshire region. The positive impact of participation in networks supports artistic resilience across social, economic and cultural value systems (Holden 2015, Virani et al. 2021). Artists from the Global Majority are not connected and lack visibility, particularly if their art practices arise from non-western aesthetic traditions. As ongoing research by YVAN, impacts and practices will be shared and contribute to fair and equitable arts policy frameworks.

PhD Project description



"Blu-me" 2021 by Janet Wallace / BTO2 logo designed by Azizah Raghib

The Business Resilience and the Visual Arts Report (Space, 2021) evidenced that the strength of peer networks is a key factor for a flourishing visual arts sector with benefits to the artist and economy. Ecology of Culture (Holden, 2015) explains how network participation enhances social capital such as community, validation, adaptability and peer art critique, whilst (Space, 2021) demonstrates networks as engines for generating income, both of which are critical to the sustainability and survivability of the visual artist.

Project findings (YVAN 2022) that examined the informal network as a mechanism for artist's resilience practices demonstrates that Global Majority artists are not connected in the current network of networks in the region. If artists are participating, they and their cultural outputs are under-represented, particularly if their art practices arise from non-western aesthetic traditions.

Research Questions

1. What are the barriers to the active participation of Global Majority artists?
2. Where does value lie within the relationships and organisational structures therein?

3. What peer-led participative research methods would facilitate data gathering whilst strengthening connections and collective action for and by Global Majority artists?
4. What approaches would be adopted that mobilise programmes of post-colonial activism in the fields of arts and humanities research that lead to a step change in institutional norms and behaviours?

YVAN's [Beyond the Obvious 2 \(BTO2\)](#) with Sheffield Hallam University, supported an emergent grouping of Global Majority artists, resulted in an exhibition and a publication. Framed by the research question 'Whose Voice', BTO2 was led by curators with diverse ethnicities and cultural practices and used a 'snowballing' method to engage 16 artists. Themes of heritage, social & cultural space and education were foregrounded by commissioned texts, and artists' responses included podcast, performance/installation, poetry/text, painting, sculpture, spoken word and DJ set. BTO2 demonstrates that wider discourses in diasporic communities, such as development of anti-racist strategies, forging inter-community solidarities and creating tools for transformation, take place in Global Majority artists' networks.

National surveys (CVAN 2022) conclude that existing networks have implicit terms of reference and power structures that benefit the majority white arts community. Due to the construct of a western aesthetic and art market operations, Global Majority artists and their cultural output are commonly excluded or marginalised (Lorde 2007, Ahmed 2012).

Methodology

The student would be encouraged to adopt novel research methodologies to gather and disseminate findings whilst empowering action led by participants, including: reading groups; wider community collaboration; art making; publication; social media; public events; and interviews.

YVAN has extensive experience of curating action-based research and has extensive primary research materials including databases of networks.

Scope for autonomy

The format and conceptual approach would propose a radical revision that takes its starting point from practices and texts by Global Majority artists, critical writers and theorists. There remains significant scope for the student to refine the research questions and for the framing and choice of methods to match their skills and interests.

There are precedents set by YVAN's current CDA researchers of the benefits of international research trips that include speaking to conference and at events, and instigating placements that foster future employability as a researcher, including 3 months with UK Govt Dept. for Work and Pensions.

About YVAN

Yorkshire & Humber Visual Arts Network (YVAN) supports visual arts practice across the region and is part of the national Contemporary Visual Arts Network (CVAN). YVAN is committed to ensuring that the visual arts is contemporary, inclusive and diverse; and challenges itself to examine all bias and prejudice that prevents the enrichment, experience and participation in cultural life for all.

YVAN's governance structure was systemically restructured in 2021 in response to its commitment to leading research and evidence collection and to drive forward an Anti-Racism Framework at organisational level. YVAN structure embeds working groups - Learning & Research, and Equity, Diversity & Wellbeing - that include Global Majority academics, artist practitioners and third sector specialists.

YVAN's business and strategic plan (with Performance Indicators) includes the development of this CDA research to tackle the poor representation for Global Majority artists in current networks. Our programme over the last four years has been research-led and there is extensive data and reports to be used as primary research materials, alongside the involvement of artists who could be invited into further research exercises.

YVAN Annual Report

<https://www.yvan.org.uk/projects/yvan-annual-report-2022>

Engagement, outreach, dissemination and impact initiatives

The researcher has the opportunity to collaborate and contribute to a range of YVAN's public-facing activities that engage Global Majority arts audiences and related publics, and benefit from being situated in a broader field of visual arts practice. The Learning & Research Working Party will provide a regular internal support mechanism and co-produce knowledge exchange with Global Majority organisations and artists. Researcher-led activities can be supported by YVAN's staff team with marketing and admin input.

The student will be invited to help deliver YVAN's work such as BTO3 exhibitions, monthly online 'socials', regional symposium (2026) and publications, all of which provide a creative platform for evidence collection and dissemination.

Opportunities include:

- Co-produce events with YVAN's current Collaborative Doctoral Award researchers in partnership with Universities of Leeds (WRoCAH) and

Newcastle (Northern Bridge) on the sustainability, impact and value of artist networks in the Yorkshire region

- Help shape Arts Council England-awarded Nourish programme for artist networks' support and cross-fertilisation
- Add to a detailed database and map of regional active artist networks
- Disseminate findings through a new website development for YVAN that incorporates research initiatives

The impact of this research on YVAN is critical in building knowledge and resources for Global Majority artists to fully participate in the visual arts.

Financial support

Studentships for doctoral research are 40 months in duration for full-time study. Awards are subject to satisfactory academic progress. Awards must be taken up in October 2024; no deferrals are possible. Awards will comprise fees at Research Council rates and a tax and national insurance free maintenance grant. The grant pays the fees at the Home/UK rate; international students are, however, eligible to apply for this Studentship and the difference between the Home/UK and International fee will be met by the University of Leeds for a successful international applicant. Awards may be taken up on a part-time basis if a student is eligible to undertake part-time study; international applicants may be required to study full-time under the terms of their visa.

Funding schemes are available to help support conference attendance, fieldwork and training, where appropriate.

Fees for Global Majority artist respondents; to ensure parity, freelance artists ask for payment to participate in research (Artist Union England guidelines). YVAN will offer £2,000 in 2025/26 to cover associated participant fees (confirmed).

CVAN is fundraising for a national conference in 2025/25 which would include speakers' fees (£300 - unconfirmed).

Qualifications

Strong applicants will have a good first degree in an appropriate subject, as well as a Master's degree (or be working towards one) and professional experience relevant to the scope of the project. We are looking for a well-qualified student with a background in any of the following disciplines:

arts and cultural management, cultural studies, fine art practice, museum studies, heritage studies.

Requirements of the Studentship

WROCAH students are required to undertake a bespoke training package and to complete a Researcher Employability Project of at least a month, a Knowledge Exchange Project, and engage with Internationalisation.

All WROCAH students must submit their thesis for examination within the funded period. This is a requirement of the Arts & Humanities Research Council, which provides the funding for WROCAH, and is a condition of accepting a Studentship.

Before applying for any WROCAH Studentship, please first ensure that you have read the WROCAH webpages about the WROCAH training programme and requirements, as well as other funding opportunities

<http://wrocah.ac.uk/>

How to apply

By 12 noon Wednesday 6 March 2024, applicants are required to submit to WROCAH an Expression of Interest, which should include:

1. A CV with details of academic qualifications
2. A covering letter comprising a two-page statement to convey your motivation and enthusiasm for the project, and to demonstrate your suitability for your intended PhD studies with the University and Project Partner.

The covering letter should specifically highlight the following:

- Your interest in the project and details on why you have chosen that University and Project Partner.
- How you will apply your current skills, knowledge and experience to undertake a PhD and the approach you would take to develop the project.
- How the project fits into your career plans and ambitions.

Applications must be submitted via [this Expression of Interest form](#).

- 15 March 2024: decision on short-listing. The short-list of candidates to be invited for an interview will be announced on Friday 15 March 2024.
- *Short-listed candidates must complete a PhD programme application before interview.* If you are short-listed for an interview you will be sent details of how to apply for a place at the University of Leeds. At that point you will need to submit the names and contact details of two referees, copies of transcripts of your academic qualifications and (if applicable) an IELTS certificate.
- Afternoon of Wednesday 24th April 2024: interviews

Interviews will involve the academic supervisor, Project Partner supervisor and a member of the WRoCAH Studentships Committee. They will be conducted online.

For more information about this project contact

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