

**What
would
Joan Littlewood
say?**

**What
would
Joan Littlewood
say?**

Editor's note



A civic space is a public space. It is a safe space which belongs to everyone and where everyone is welcome, and communities can gather together to agree and disagree in a constructive environment, tell the stories of the past and present that matter to them and imagine the future together.

Once upon a time the town square fulfilled this function, but in our own fractured age of polarised dissent and rising populism it is our arts organisations – the museums, galleries and theatres – which have the potential to be the great civic spaces of the 21st century, the new town squares.

In the following pages you will find a series of interviews with arts practitioners who run theatres, museums, companies, arts centres, culture departments and who are on the boards of arts organisations. All of them are ahead of the curve in understanding that great leadership means embracing the civic responsibilities of the arts. Excellence and engagement are not binaries but bound together in complex layers. Arts organisations can offer both the beautiful and useful.

As the Tate's Maria Balshaw puts it: "fulfilling our civic responsibility makes us relevant." Joe Murphy and Joe Robertson, who founded Good Chance and work with refugees in Calais and Paris, talk about responding

to changing circumstances and going where the arts feels most needed. Madani Younis explains how the arts need to gain the trust of their communities and partner with those already intimately connected on the ground. In the wake of the Grenfell fire the Bush was only able to play a role because it was already embedded in and trusted by the community.

Getting out of the way, not assuming that arts organisations have all the answers, understanding that the welcome is crucial, questioning who holds the power, making good relationships over the longer term and really listening to the local community is a recurrent theme. Those concerns define those arts organisations who, as Kwame Kwei-Armah of the Young Vic puts it, now increasingly understand that taking civic responsibility is not a "smaller piece of land for us to stand upon."

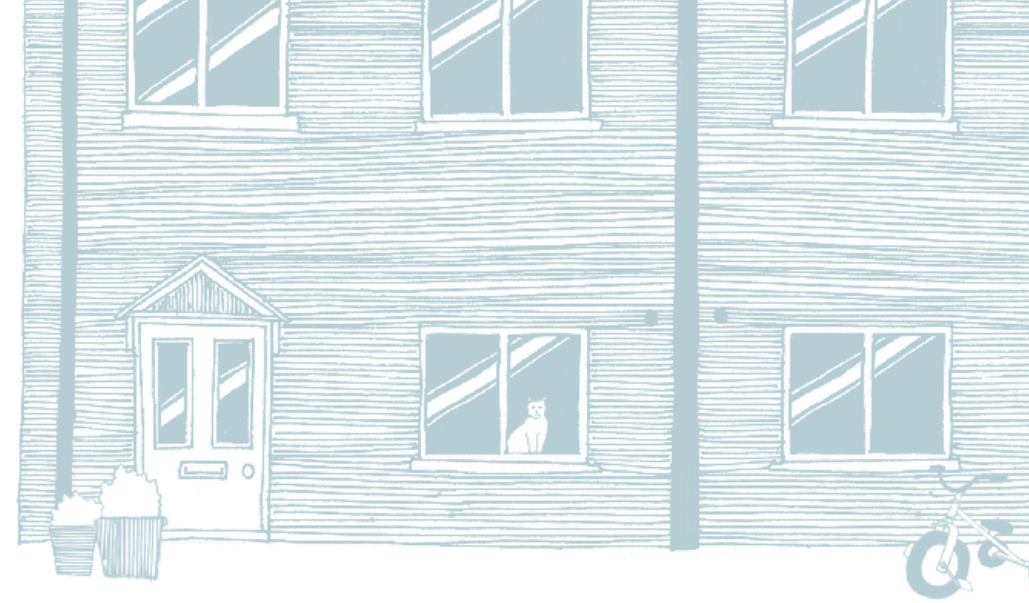
Rather it is an entire continent, and one which sees artists, arts organisations and the public as co-creators with a shared stake in the future. As the Tricycle's Indhu Rubasingham says, it's about arts organisations coming together with their communities to ask: "what can we do together and better."

LYN GARDNER

Introduction

The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation has long supported the belief that the arts enriches life for all of us, that a society in which the arts flourish sits with efforts to promote greater social justice: the arts at the centre of civic life. Our two year inquiry and consultations focused on the question: What does it mean for arts organisations to play a civic role? For some, a civic role is at the heart of their mission and practice, developing creativity, enhancing wellbeing and fostering social cohesion. At a time of political, social and environmental change, it seems that we need the arts more than ever to create a safe space for debate, empathy and understanding and also to reflect back to us diverse realities.

Joan Littlewood was a pioneering arts activist who never lost sight of her belief that the arts belonged to everyone and could not only enrich society but should also reflect and represent all parts of our society. She was co-creating and practising cultural democracy long before the terms were even invented. Joan put her ideas into practice over 70 years ago, yet we are still debating these issues and ideas as if they were new, making a case for arts organisations to occupy an essential space at the heart of civic life.



70 years on, what would Joan say about our efforts? For this small booklet, we have asked 10 figures from the arts and culture sector to comment on what it means for arts organisations to fulfil a civic role. It is clear from the words of these cultural commentators that there is scope for a plurality of approaches and ideas; however, the ambition for authenticity, inclusion and relevance runs throughout. The key notion is that the arts and cultural spaces belong to and reflect their communities, placing the communities at the centre of artistic practice and the arts at the centre of civic life.

ANDREW BARNETT
DIRECTOR
CALOUSTE GULBENKIAN FOUNDATION, UK BRANCH

Joan Littlewood

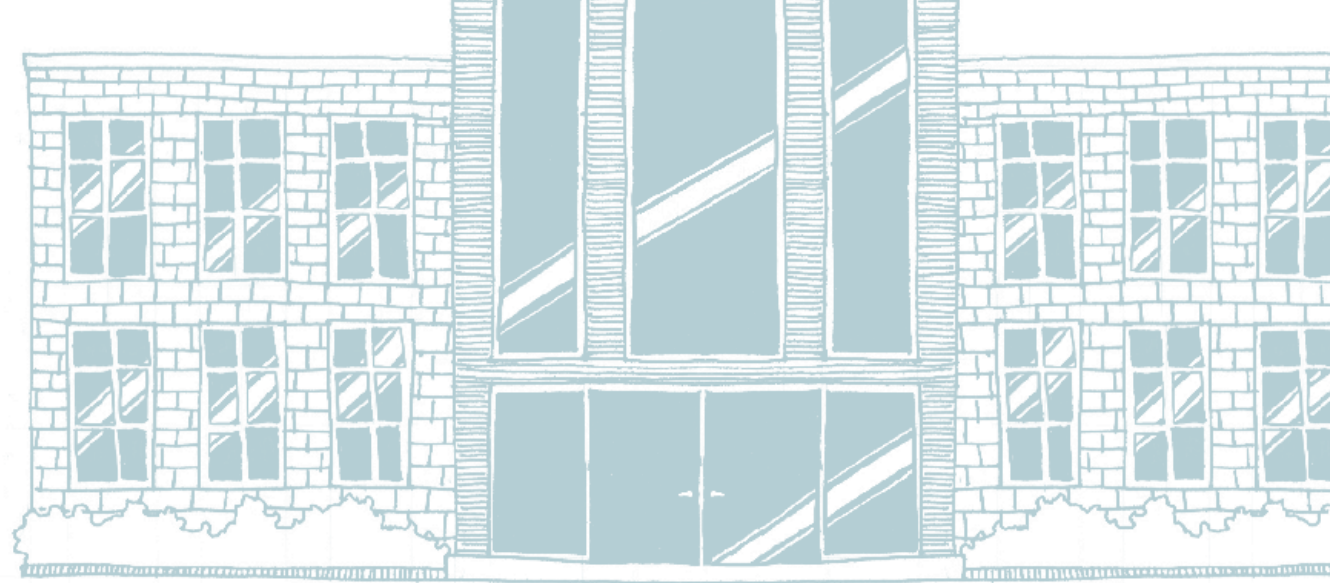
“Once upon a time, the London theatre was a charming mirror held up to cosiness. Then came Joan Littlewood, smashing the glass, blasting the walls, letting the wind of life blow in a rough, but ready, world.”

– PETER BROOK (theatre director)

Joan Littlewood was born in 1914 in Stockwell, London. Her mother, only a teenager, was unmarried and worked at a brush manufacturer. Despite Joan’s working-class background, at age 16 she won a scholarship to the prestigious Royal Academy of National Arts, but left without graduating, declaring it a ‘waste of time’.

She instead formed the Theatre of Action, a touring company which staged experimental plays for working-class audiences focusing on social issues. In 1953 it made a home in the derelict Theatre Royal in Stratford, London. Joan and her team had no money so lived in the theatre, doing the repairs, maintenance, and redecoration in between rehearsing the plays for their first season.

Plays Joan nurtured at the Theatre Royal were relevant, political and won critical and commercial success. She staged the British première of Bertolt Brecht’s *Mother Courage and Her Children* in 1955, which at his request she took on the titular role. The satirical musical *Oh, What a Lovely War!* (1963) juxtaposed the horrors of war with



sentimental songs. And Joan was the first to stage *A Taste of Honey*, a pioneering ‘kitchen sink’ play which explored themes of race, gender and sexuality.

Joan believed creativity should be accessible to all and spoke of ‘the genius in every person’. With the architect Cedric Price, they designed a building where this could be possible – a ‘laboratory of fun’ where the sciences and the arts could be explored by everyone in the community and could contribute to social connectedness. While their dream went largely unrealised in their lifetimes, the Fun Palaces movement launched in 2014, the year of Joan’s centenary, brings these laboratories to life for a weekend each year across the country.

In her lifetime Joan Littlewood was banned by the BBC for being too radical and was monitored by M15 for twenty years. She died in 2002 at the age of 87. Although much of her work took place over 50 years ago she remains an inspirational figure to those leading arts organisations today which are challenging the status quo. ■

The metaphors



COLLEGES

Colleges – Arts organisations have a role as places of lifelong learning, enabling everyone to reach their potential.

Town Halls – Arts organisations provide safe places for considering and debating difficult issues. They can present issues in their full complexity and give them a human texture.



TOWN HALLS



PARKS

Parks – Arts organisations offer shared public space that is open to all. Like parks, they offer people a choice of whether to be active or sit quietly, to come as a group or to be alone.

Temples – Arts organisations provide a secular society with an opportunity to contemplate moral questions about how we live and how we relate to others.



TEMPLES



HOME

Home – Arts organisations can be places of safety and belonging, where people can be relaxed and feel themselves. They can provide a space to create work based on people's experiences and aspirations.

The interviews

12 [DR. MARIA BALSHAW CBE](#)
Fulfilling our civic responsibility makes us relevant as arts institutions

16 [KWAME KWEI-ARMAH OBE](#)
The community must be the engine of the whole enterprise

20 [DOREEN FOSTER](#)
Building a sense of belonging

24 [KULLY THIARAI](#)
A duty of care about the nature of engagement

28 [MADANI YOUNIS](#)
We are not the protagonist in the stories of our community

32 [INDHU RUBASINGHAM MBE](#)
What more can a theatre do and say?

36 [DAVID JUBB](#)
Not for me, not for you, but for us

40 [CLAIRE MCCOLGAN MBE](#)
Transforming the city through culture

44 [JOE MURPHY & JOE ROBERTSON](#)
An intervention where it feels most needed

48 [ALTHEA EFUNSHILE CBE](#)
What value are we adding to society?

DR. MARIA BALSHAW CBE

Maria is Director of Tate. She previously worked as Director of the Whitworth, University of Manchester and Manchester City Galleries. She was Director of Culture for Manchester City Council from 2013 to 2017, helping to establish the city as a leading cultural centre for the UK.

Fulfilling our civic responsibility makes us relevant as arts institutions

I have talked throughout my career in museums about the civic role and responsibility that institutions like Tate or Manchester Art Gallery or the Whitworth have. I use the word civic because I am really interested in the idea of a public space which is conceived to hold objects and hold them for the public and for the service of the public. So, for me, the notion of being a civic space for your community comes with the idea of being a free public museum.

We have some fundamentals that are important to British society, now more than ever, which are to do with seeing our heritage as a right for everyone, whether that is museums or a wonderful coastline, or heritage buildings held in trust for people. These are all part of our tax-paying rights.

To me, what cultural institutions have in common is that we hold narratives about our past and our future potential. In museums those stories

are wrapped around works of art or objects and in theatre they are wrapped around unfolding narratives. Each gives us an opportunity to reflect on who we are, where we sit in the world and what kind of world we want to have. We need these spaces where we can actively debate that without moving into polarised and aggressive dialogue.

Fulfilling our civic responsibility makes us relevant as arts institutions. We should be rooted in the cities and towns we are in, particularly as we are supported by the public purse. I can't understand why anyone would want to lead an organisation which says: we are content to speak only to a small portion of the community as our audience.

So, it is part of our civic role to strive to engage wider audiences and we do that through a wider and more diverse programme of activities which are about sharing and expanding knowledge. That is very exciting for the staff to work on because as we explore those broader questions, a broader range of people want to work with us and we can draw from the most diverse talent pool.

Positive civic responsibility comes in different guises. At the Whitworth we noticed older male visitors from lower socio-economic

**We should be rooted
in the cities and towns
we are in, particularly
as we are supported
by the public purse**

We can be very gentle and local even though we are an international organisation

groups were almost completely absent. That is something that is true across almost all of the arts. We asked where those men went? The answer was the pub on the other side of the park.

An older model of engagement would have said we must bring those men into the gallery, instead we went to them and found out what their interests and needs were. We commissioned a poet we had worked with to be resident in the pub. What emerged over weeks was an incredibly nuanced and useful picture of why older men didn't come and why they might want to, and what we could then offer them. They were often very isolated and the pub was a welcoming place for them.

But when they started to talk about things they had passions for, the things they collected in their own lives, their own life histories, a huge range of things that were relevant to them and the Whitworth was revealed. They worked with us to provide a handbook about how arts organisations could work with older men.

A group also worked with us to make an exhibition that included their various collections – tools from their working lives or objects

from family life. We were still being an art museum, but we expanded our civic space in undertaking that activity. My practical experience is that by building relationships with people who don't come to the museum, as well as those who do come, you expand the possibilities of a collection space.

We're doing that at Tate too. We engage with other organisations – whether they are housing organisations or universities, or grassroots arts initiatives or the museum of homelessness – to give a space to their ideas and their constituencies in our Tate Exchange space and programme. It is through those partnerships that we build and expand as an organisation.

We are currently working with the artist Steve McQueen on the Year 3 Project to create a portrait of all London's 7 and 8-year-olds. It will be a major installation, but the hard work of that project is in the work of our learning team and the photographers we have trained and who are engaging with schools who don't currently come to central London, although they are part of the city. Schools who don't feel that they would be welcomed and for whom the journey, either physically or emotionally, feels very long.

If you are a child growing up in an outer London Borough, for example, you won't necessarily think that Tate has anything at all to do with your life. It's crucial to me as a national institution that Tate also demonstrates that it is a local institution. Tate's collection has an impact across the UK, but we also have an obligation to the citizens of London closer to us and those further away because we have a responsibility to make sure that the cultural wealth is shared.

We can be very gentle and local even though we are an international organisation and it's important that we do that work so that we are a genuinely generous institution serving all our possible constituents. ■

KWAME KWEI-ARMAH OBE

Kwame is Artistic Director of the Young Vic, which has one of the most diverse audiences in London. He was previously the Artistic Director of the Baltimore Center Stage Theatre. Kwame was the Chancellor of the University of the Arts London from 2010 to 2015.

The community must be the engine of the whole enterprise

Civic responsibility are two words I embrace. I use them about six times a day. I use them because I have to validate why I am in theatre to myself and because I am always asking questions about who we are speaking to and how we can move beyond that small percentage of people who regularly walk into a theatre.

The challenge to myself and the team is that we are living at a time where the canon is not fit for purpose for the 21st century so questions about how we treat it or what we do with it, or however we avoid it, stand on the ground of civic responsibility.

There was a time when it felt really pompous to talk about civic responsibility and you had to fight through that veneer of pomposity and get to that place where you say no, I truly do believe that arts institutions shouldn't be put in the narrow bandwidth of just

entertainment. We are part of civic society and what we do is to give joy to people and contribute to the betterment of people's lives and that means that we have to be part of the community. When you produce great art, you bind the community together. The community must be the engine of the whole enterprise.

It was when I transitioned to being a writer that I started to think that the role was bigger than what it was that I wanted to say; the role is about asking who it is you are serving by writing this piece. Then when I went to the States as an artistic director, it became concrete. There I had to be responsible for a community, a geographic community not a community that has a prefix – the black community or the gay community – but the community around the theatre. That made me realise this is about a civic responsibility.

In the US it's part of the gig; being a community centre, the town hall and town square is part of the remit of any arts organisation. Taking civic responsibility as an arts organisation felt cut and dry in the States. It was what was expected of the arts and me as an artistic director. Going out to donors and philanthropists, one had to make the case: I am not just coming to you because I want to put on a play I really like but I am also

**In the US it's part of the gig;
being a community centre,
the town hall and town
square is part of the remit
of any arts organisation**

Our theatres are there to serve everyone, in every way, and that means contributing to the better mental health of the community as well as making art

coming to you because we are trying to serve in a civic minded way and a way that ensures your philanthropic dollars will be put to good use.

It has changed here in the UK, too. 'Civic' in the arts once felt like a smaller piece of land for us to stand on, that somehow working in local government was civic but not working in theatre. But there is no better way of challenging government than standing on the ground of our civic responsibility and showing that our theatres are there to serve everyone, in every way, and that means contributing to the better mental health of the community as well as making art.

One of the first initiatives I started here at the Young Vic was to create Young Vic Unpacked, along with Imogen Brodie, head of Taking Part, knowing that there are communities who will not come into our theatres and they deserve art too. Let us take high quality work to them

without requesting they ever come back to the theatre. They deserve to see theatre even if they don't want to come to the building. Civic responsibility is manifest too in the kind of work I want to do on stage. The big question for me with every piece of art we do here is what is its social relevance? Without being civically minded, those questions don't exist.

It changes the building as well because if the building is taking its civic responsibility seriously it doesn't just see itself and what it does as being about the profit and loss of a show at box office, or how many stars it gets. Instead it sees itself in relation to how many communities came to see it or had discussions about the themes, and how did it resonate outside of the stage. Within an institution that also extends to who is being employed in the building and why we care about who works behind the scenes as much as those on the stages; so that immediately takes itself into areas of representation, identity, disability and disadvantage. I really believe that simply by having civic responsibility at the heart of a building, it seeps into every corner of an organisation and affects and shapes not just those who come in between 7.00pm and 10.00pm but also those who are here at 10am in the morning.

Has theatre just woken up to the notion of civic responsibility in the arts? My guess is that we've always known its power, but we are becoming bolder about talking about it. We have personally felt the transformations of civic action in art. We are now living in an age where we have the language to talk about it and the platforms. People are listening, society is ready to hear. ■

DOREEN FOSTER

Doreen is director of the University of Warwick's Warwick Arts Centre, one of the UK's largest arts venues outside London. She was previously deputy director of the Black Cultural Archives and Chief Executive of the Bernie Grant Arts Centre, which develops diverse cultural and creative practitioners.

Building a sense of belonging

I really started using the word civic 10 years ago when I was at the Bernie Grant Arts Centre in Tottenham and because of a shifting demographic one of the things I was trying to do was to find a way to create a space that was neutral. Then I visited the Walker Arts Centre in Minneapolis where the changing community had led to thinking about how you create a space which is more like a town centre, a space where anyone can feel at home and anyone's voice can be heard.

I come from Birmingham, a city where there are civic buildings that are part of city life. Those civic spaces were part of my life. So, for me thinking about an arts centre as civic space comes easily. Or a civic space as a place where arts and culture can thrive.

Look at Liverpool. It is a city transformed by investment in culture and human beings. Cities are not just about buildings, they are about people. It's why I am excited about Coventry being City of Culture in

2021. But it's not a quick fix. The danger is in thinking that you can give an injection – you can't, real cultural change needs sustenance over many years.

The question I am asking now is how we help people on the far reaches of the city centre to see Warwick Arts Centre, which is on the university campus, as something that belongs to them too. How do we get the young people from the local housing estate to occupy it? The thing about belonging is that it doesn't just happen, it's something that you have to build and it's that building which is part of the civic responsibility of arts organisations. It is only when I have a sense that I belong somewhere that I can claim it in some way.

We have a civic responsibility to recognise that our constituency is broader than we have acknowledged in the past. Whose building is it? Are arts institutions creating these spaces for themselves or for other people? The crucial question is how do you find different ways to be in the space that allow more room for other people, the people who didn't previously see it as their space?

Our cultural institutions and cultural leaders need to get out of the way if they are really committed to change because it is only when they

I am excited about Coventry being City of Culture in 2021. But it's not a quick fix. The danger is in thinking that you can give an injection – you can't, real cultural change needs sustenance over many years

The thing about belonging is that it doesn't just happen, it's something that you have to build and it's that building which is part of the civic responsibility of arts organisations

get out of the way that we can fully understand what others might want to do with the space. Otherwise you just keep trying to fit people into your own agenda. We might know what a great programme looks like for us, but is it a great programme for other people? I sometimes think that we need to be a little less precious about our programming if we really want to turn ourselves to face a new audience.

There is a mindset in lots of places which is: "let's not upset the audience we've already got." But it's not about getting rid of existing audiences, it's about encouraging them to be more adventurous. We have to change. In Coventry there are pressing demographic reasons to transform our engagement because our audience is ageing, 36 per cent of the population is from non-White backgrounds, but the only night when we see 36 per cent plus of that demographic in our spaces is when we have an Asian theatre company or Asian music. That's not right.

Part of what we are doing at Warwick Arts Centre is finding people who are much better connected in the community than we are, so we will be spending time working in local communities and familiarising ourselves with what is happening and not assuming that we know what drives people or the changes they want to see. We are working with those intermediaries to develop projects that are useful to the community and maybe slowly those communities will come into the arts centre.

People are not going to come simply because we say "hey, why don't you come to our building." I think of it in this way: you play with someone on the street for a bit, and after a while you go into their backyard to play and then maybe their parents might say "stay for tea" and then they go to yours for tea.

It takes time, and that is an investment. It's about having the vision like Capability Brown planting trees. Often, we don't have the vision and the belief. He planted all those saplings knowing he wouldn't live to see what the landscape would eventually look like, but he had the vision. We have got to have the vision and belief that if we make these interventions some of them will return faster than others, but it will take time because we have neglected people for generations.

Often in the arts we go into a community and do a project and expect them to turn around and say "yes, I'm grateful." But why should they be? They have always found other ways to entertain themselves and deal with the issues they face as a community and then we go in thinking that we have got the answer. We haven't. ■

KULLY THIARAI

Kully is Artistic Director of National Theatre Wales, which makes site-specific productions embedded in communities. She previously worked as Artistic Director of Leicester Haymarket Theatre and Contact theatre and was founding Director of CAST putting Doncaster firmly on the UK's cultural map.

A duty of care about the nature of engagement

I have instinctively always thought our role as artists and arts organisations is in making a connection with audiences, and that conversation is important in supporting our civic responsibilities and making the most of that engagement with communities.

With buildings you have bricks and mortar in a location which has a community around it and the civic responsibility is to enable people to feel they can come through the door and feel a sense of ownership. It must be a core purpose of how you deliver work, and it influences the creative and aesthetic relationship with your public.

It doesn't mean that you have to undermine your artistic integrity or practice or ambition. But it does mean that there will be times when you say: 'what is it that I really want to make and what is it that is necessary to be made?' and they may be two different things. I might

want to make a Sondheim show because I love it but the question I need to ask is whether that is the right show to be made at this moment in time in this location and with these people. It's about responsibility to that community.

It doesn't mean you are making a lesser product just because you are working for a particular community. When I was at Leicester, I made a piece, Bollywood Jane, which was designed to address the local South Asian communities but it brought in a much wider community. Sometimes I feel that we use that notion of quality as a mechanism to not do something that might be different. Innovation happens because somebody decides to take a risk.

Ultimately, I think whatever location your arts organisation is in and whether it does or doesn't have a building, it is about the nature of the welcome you make. That matters because if vast numbers of people don't engage with the arts, and the Warwick Report tells us that they do not, then we must have been doing something wrong in that encounter and we must change. Because I don't believe that the public aren't interested in art, but I do believe there is a disconnect between the work made and how we communicate to the public about it.

Sometimes I feel that we use that notion of quality as a mechanism to not do something that might be different. Innovation happens because somebody decides to take a risk

If vast numbers of people don't engage with the arts, then we must have been doing something wrong in that encounter and we must change. I don't believe that the public aren't interested in art, but I do believe there is a disconnect between the work made and how we communicate to the public about it

One of brilliant things that happened when I was at CAST in Doncaster was when feedback come back with people saying; "what I love about this space is that everyone smiles." That might seem silly, but it holds a huge amount of useful information around whether people feel that it's alright to be in a space and be themselves.

I myself have experienced being somewhere where you feel that there is nobody else like you in the room. Those emotional relationships are profound, and they operate at all sorts of levels, from the nature of the programme and who is making the decisions in that organisation to who you see when you walk into the theatre.

That is where the economic and social value of having diversity in all its forms in your organisation matters most because that insight into how people behave differently and experience the same things differently allows you to have a richer, more thoughtful and dynamic engagement with the public.

I was a kid who didn't experience any arts but later was fortunate enough to find myself in a situation where I could. So, I'm very conscious

of needing to open doors for other people because people opened doors for me. It is my duty, because I know what it feels like not to have anything. To be told that you can't achieve things, or to be in a situation when you recognise that you have an imagination and a story to tell but barriers stop you from telling it.

That means as arts organisations we have a responsibility to constantly question how we make work and where we take it, how we make the social, economic and cultural dynamics all work in a way that breaks down barriers and is genuinely engaged with the communities it serves.

At National Theatre Wales we are trying to create a more in-depth embedded practice. In Pembrokeshire and Wrexham – two very different locations, one rural and one urban – we have four year programmes in which we are modelling how we can co-create with a community, rather than going into a community and saying "we are making a show, why don't you join us?"

Instead we are asking what happens if we skill up individuals and artists in that area to frame the creative journey together, and what does it really mean to co-create with the public? Who has the power, what is the nature of that power and what is the mechanism which encourages people to make choices and explore things which are important to them, while still being ambitious with the artistic intent.

Building trust is profoundly important and takes time. You can't do that in a year. Much of the arts is funded by the tax payer and if we are to be responsible with that resource we have a duty of care about the nature of engagement and who it reaches and how it reaches them. We are thinking hard about it because if you get the balance right then everyone is richer for it, the communities and the arts organisation itself. ■

MADANI YOUNIS

Madani is Creative Director of the Southbank Centre, the UK's largest arts centre. In 2017 he was appointed to the Mayor of London's Cultural Leadership Board. He was previously Artistic Director and Chief Executive of the Bush Theatre.

We are not the protagonist in the stories of our community

During my time at The Bush Theatre, the idea of having a civic role and responsibility was for me being defined by how we engaged with our community directly. What made Shepherds Bush unique was its economic disparity. It had the highest percentage of £1million plus houses in the country shoulder to shoulder with some of the highest levels of social deprivation.

That idea of civic responsibility fed into how we as an organisation could meet the needs of a community. This is really practical stuff. At a base level if children in Shepherds Bush are going to school without breakfast how does a building like ours work with a third sector organisation to ensure we are helping those children to eat before they go to school? From such small interventions come change, and the issue is how do we, as an arts organisation, find connections

with those organisations who are engaged in delivering the needs of the community.

When the Grenfell Tower fire happened there was a lot of talk about how communities had stepped in where the government has failed. We should remind ourselves that the community had been stepping in way before Grenfell happened. What we never spoke about was how our building was used to host families awaiting news of loved ones and we did that by working with a Somalian organisation who knew the community well.

It is one of the many quiet organisations, often invisible and volunteer-led, that are the reason why communities are still alive. If only we were more willing as arts organisations to stop and look deeper at what is happening in our neighbourhood and work with those who do know. At the Bush we were engaged on the ground long before Grenfell happened. We were rung for help because people knew that we weren't there just some of the time, but we were there all of the time.

The authenticity by which organisations seek to engage is crucial. My attitude at the Bush was always that we are based in a particular place and the concerns of the community are our concerns too. What

Part of civic responsibility is looking at how we are accountable internally and that means who we employ and how we really respond to the community

What I want us to avoid is the Christopher Columbus effect of cultural buildings thinking they know what they should be doing in the interests of communities. By that, I mean from on high we are somehow trying to civilise communities with our particular idea of culture

it seems hard for cultural organisations to understand is that they are not the protagonist in the stories of their community, but they are the subjects of their community storytelling. We have to find a level of humility in our relationship with communities. We cannot assume that we are needed; instead we have to prove that we are trustworthy. As cultural organisations we have to become more human in the eyes of our community, and we have to learn from their humanity.

What I want us to avoid is the Christopher Columbus effect of cultural buildings thinking they know what they should be doing in the interests of communities. By that, I mean from on high we are somehow trying to civilise communities with our particular idea of culture. It is such a dated and desperately elitist way of looking at communities. Instead real civic responsibility is connecting at a deep level with the community through the community organisations who already know those communities well.

Rarely do I hear arts organisations talking about democratising culture. The most powerful thing that I or any leader in the arts can do is

to lose control. That parental relationship that we so often see from arts leaders and the cultural sector is so dated, it's not surprising that the programmes and ideas are so cyclical and narrow in their scope. There is an opportunity right now as our society becomes more divided and the demographics change so acutely. We are at the cross roads, so civic responsibility is about an acknowledgement that we are complicit in shaping and redefining our cities and the decisions we make now as cultural organisations will shape the future of the city.

I'm now Creative Director at the Southbank Centre and when I look at the cultural organisations up and down the river, the question I ask is: do those organisations reflect the south London communities in which they are situate? Part of civic responsibility is looking at how we are accountable internally and that means who we employ and how we really respond to the community.

The great opportunity that we have here at the Southbank is that we have a national and international reach, but we are also in south London in the borough of Lambeth. There is an opportunity to ask ourselves who are we serving and to explore what should be our focus. My money is on looking locally. That's how we will make the Southbank Centre feel like the arts centre for south London.

We cannot assume that people will want to hear about us, but we can respond to their need. It's why over the next few months I see my job as spending time meeting with the organisations on the ground who have been born of need and who are already working in the south London community. I will not be assuming that I know anything. My strategy is to be in service of those who are already here and who do already know. ■

INDHU RUBASINGHAM MBE

Indhu is a theatre director and the current Artistic Director of the Kiln Theatre (formerly the Tricycle Theatre), which seeks to bring unheard voices into the mainstream.

What more can a theatre do and say?

The Kiln has a responsibility to engage with our area and community and inspire people. Theatre's power is that it can bring large groups of people together in a secular way, which is a civic role.

It's like the town square, but in order to get all those groups congregating you have to work very hard at breaking down any sense of barrier or complication or unease. You need to make it an easy, warm and a safe place that anyone can feel comfortable walking into, whoever they are and whatever their age or background.

What's really exciting about Kilburn is that there are so many different communities and age groups and people of different backgrounds and incomes. The Kiln is so proud of where it sits, and we do everything possible to make sure the community can be proud of it.

What is really key is that the offer that we make is of the highest quality possible so the building, the work on stage, the outreach work and

the experience is the very best. The community always informs that. The culture of a building changes because you listen. We are always trying to have more meaningful conversations in the community, to be in dialogue with the community. Sometimes it's a quite robust discussion, and that's good.

The idea of a local theatre with an international vision sits really interestingly here because over 130 languages are spoken in Brent.

We are a theatre, and our passion and heart are in the theatre and what happens on our stage. I believe in the power of theatre and it can be transformative in the engagement of making it and watching it. Look at Joan Littlewood, she was a theatre maker and through that passion she had for theatre and the work she made she expanded what a theatre could be and say.

But you do have to think about why you are making the work that you are. I could have just come in here and started making different versions of the classics. But it wouldn't have been relevant to this particular place at this particular time. It's about your responsibility as an artistic director to where you are and the time you are in. When we did Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* it felt like a hybrid of that, a big international

The culture of a building changes because you listen

Look at Joan Littlewood, she was a theatre maker and through that passion she had for theatre and the work she made she expanded what a theatre could be and say

book which is set locally and celebrated locally. The way the community owned that show made me so proud. It felt like a lovely moment when the work we do on stage and the work we are doing with the community met and melded.

What has changed here is that the community now gets access to the stage and we are intent on making their experience as professional as possible in every way. I'm uncomfortable about a theatre not striving to make community work of high quality, because it sits in a particular area. Our communities deserve the best possible work and they deserve it now, whether they are in the audience or on the stage. They are our collaborators, and we can't just be saying come and see what we do, but rather we must always ask: what can we do together and better?

In some organisations the outreach team is always fighting for purchase, but not here. It's not just their fight, it's the whole building's fight. There is long term, patient work going on in council estates and

post-code gang areas, working with the young people and listening to them. It's about developing relationships over years. It's impossible to reach everyone, but it is about the depth of engagement. There are no quick fixes; it is about trying to understand the barriers and why people don't come. It could be as simple as it being two bus rides and therefore two Oyster card clicks; if you can solve the travel arrangements then those young people will come.

For more than 10 years we've been doing a project here with 12-18-year-olds who are recently arrived immigrants or refugees for whom English is a second language. Those young people inform everything we do and what our values are. When we were doing the capital project one of the questions I kept asking myself was: "How would those young people feel in this space? Would they feel safe and welcome? Would they feel as if they belonged here? Could they think of it as home?"

Of course, there are tensions in that. We need a business model which is robust and viable but we also want people to be able to afford to buy a sandwich in the café or have a space where they can just hang out and use the facilities without feeling the need to buy anything, whether that is a drink or a ticket to the theatre or cinema. The tension is in carving up the space for different activities and we don't have a lot of space.

It's about the messages that you are communicating. You can't say everyone is welcome and then not be welcoming. Yes, you need a business plan, but when you have public subsidy you are not a purely commercial enterprise. With public investment comes responsibility and accountability. ■

DAVID JUBB

David is a theatre producer. He was Artistic Director and Chief Executive of Battersea Arts Centre (BAC) from 2004 to 2019. In his role at BAC he led a change of the organisation's mission to become a more civic-minded arts centre. Working with colleagues across the country he helped set up the *Co-Creating Change* network.

Not for me, not for you, but for us

Civic responsibility is about what you do and is based in the values of an organisation. Whenever I refer to the motto which is etched into BAC's ceiling, "Not for me, not for you but for us," anyone – whether they are 10 years old, a professional artist, a councillor or a teacher – immediately knows what I am talking about.

When you apply that to arts and culture, you end up with a different view about the talent you are developing, the people you are supporting and the way you are using your resource; even questioning whether it is 'your resource' in the first place. Your decisions become less about the classic great art mission that we have seen from Arts Council England in the past and they become more about the civic. I think funders are starting to understand the value of this, and it's a change we need because we would never have been able to do 90% of the things we've done at BAC without

far-sighted funders who have gone beyond their rules and reporting mechanisms to help us make stuff happen.

Take something like the Collaborative Touring Network. We knew it would enable and support but when you looked at it on the level of investment required and the number of people engaged initially, it was hard to make a viable business case for that amount of investment. But the reality is that so many towns and cities around the country have had so little support and investment that it requires a lot of pump priming initially to get to a place where confidence grows and ideas blossom. Strike a Light in Gloucester and Doorstep Arts in Torbay have both gone on to become NPOs and that wouldn't have happened without funders putting their faith in all of us.

Taking on a civic role is about making connections. When we shifted from having separate theatre producers and participation producers, we started to have different conversations. For example, we used to only have conversations with the arts and culture department of Wandsworth Council; now we collaborate with departments from economic development through to children's services. The shift is from us going to the Council's arts team and saying, "can we have some money?" to

You are only as good as the last decision you made in relation to something that connects you with your local community

We used to only have conversations with the arts and culture department of Wandsworth Council; now we collaborate with departments from economic development through to children's services. The shift is from us going to the Council's arts team and saying, "can we have some money?" to seeing ourselves as a civic realm organisation in the Borough of Wandsworth

seeing ourselves as a civic realm organisation in the Borough of Wandsworth who are providing support to the people and institutions in the borough to achieve their potential.

At its heart, it's about enabling people to tap into their creativity and it's about working with everyone in the civic realm – from your local youth services, to your local day-care centre, to the local housing office, to explore how we can creatively be inspired to make and do things together so that we are all happier and live longer.

One of the challenges for arts organisations which are trying to develop their civic role is that they are often structured like early 20th century car manufacturers! They silt up because of the hierarchies and the separate siloed departments. They are the opposite of so many independent practitioners who can dance merrily from making a piece of work that is for them, to facilitating a community led project or combining the two. We need to create more fluid organisational models which encourage change rather than fear it.

Too many cultural organisations operate on a self-replicating model of the generally white, generally male, middle-class artistic director promoting their aesthetic choices. That's the standard the sector

trains and educates to and it is a narrow one. Why are we surprised when the Warwick Commission says that we are only serving the most economically advantaged people? Why wouldn't we be? Those are the people running the theatres.

The journey here at Battersea was getting the organisation to be committed to its civic role, because, like most arts organisations, it wasn't. There was definitely a resistance internally and there still can be. Weirdly, one of the most useful things internally and externally in getting people to look at us again was the fire, which was a massive disruption but helped reset views and perspectives on what we exist to do.

In the aftermath of the fire, people's positive responses helped a lot of people understand that this was as a direct result of our changed relationship with our community. The challenge of course is that change is never-ending. Most arts organisations are so input and output based that they feel they are only as good as their last hit show or last audience stats. But actually, you are only as good as the last decision you made in relation to something that connects you with your local community.

My successor, Tarek Iskander, has got the challenge of exploring what our live programme is about and what it is for. We're supporting lots of exciting artists, but I increasingly feel that the most exciting ideas, and the ideas that relate to our core purpose, which is to inspire people to take creative risks to shape the future, are coming from our local community. So how, as a cultural organisation, do we shift the funding, the infrastructure, the building and the resources to reflect that? BAC's ambition is that its board and governance will reflect its community.

Your day to day process really matters, because people sniff out very quickly if things in your organisation are not as they should be in relation to "not for me, not for you, but for us." We are still miles from the rhetoric but we keep going. Creativity is a process. ■

CLAIRE McCOLGAN MBE

Claire is Director of Culture for the city of Liverpool. In 2000 Claire developed the successful participation programme (Creative Communities) that was instrumental in Liverpool's Capital of Culture bid in 2008. Claire is a national and international advisor on best practice in cities and cultural regeneration.

Transforming the city through culture

What culture does in its civic role is that it allows people to feel part of something that goes beyond their own individuality. If you invest in culture seriously and understand its civic role then it is transforming and creates community cohesion in times of great austerity, and Liverpool has been hit very hard by austerity. We provided hope through culture, through having the Giants, playing on the streets of the city. I think we have done that well in this city because such a huge amount of what we have done is free, accessible, and it has local stories right at its heart.

In Liverpool we fund our cultural sector well and culture is part of what makes this a great city. This city is known for its football teams and its culture. Culture has become part of how the city sees itself and how it is portrayed. The city has become a stage on which the stories of its people are told. A million people gathered on the banks of the Mersey

to see the Queens come in because the story of the sea and the story of what the sea and shipping means to them over the years is huge. It is that historical memory, transported and framed by the modern day, that we need to capture so we can reflect a city's story back to a new generation. It's important for people to know where they have come from.

Without that there is no civic pride, there is no pride in the place. You have to build the pride. We have done that by using culture, and what culture in its civic sense can do is create a city that has a sense of ambition and a real sense of itself.

I was originally a community arts worker in Speke and Toxteth in the late 90s. One of things I realised was that if regeneration stood a chance it was necessary for local people to get their voices heard and one of the best ways to do that is through culture and community arts. We learned a lot doing that and doing it over a long time. One of the reasons we won 'Capital of Culture' was because of public engagement. We put people at the heart of the bid because we saw how culture was a powerful tool that could transform the future of the city. There are stories all around the city of change in communities and that change has grown from the

What culture in its civic sense can do is create a city that has a sense of ambition and a real sense of itself

We don't need to tell a story of deprivation, because that is what people think about Liverpool in their first breath. Instead we can tell the stories that have not been heard, the stories about resilience and joyfulness. The real moments of social justice and what makes this place tick

belief that it is communities themselves who can have the idea and it is the artists who will respond to that idea, rather than the artists leading. We've seen that working in places all over the city and in many ways.

We've had a long run at it and we have had very strong, consistent political support that might not be the case in other places where politicians have not yet realised that culture is at the very heart of regeneration. We have a mayor who says yes before he says no. The mistake is when people think that culture can be a quick fix. It isn't. The Liverpool story has been 20 years in the making.

Because I work in the council and I sit next to the person dealing with social care or children's services you have got to believe in what you are doing and its value when you are talking about budgets. I see my role as fighting to make the city the best place it can be. You have got to believe in the transformational effect of what you do. We are not putting

up one service against another, we are working together and with many different organisations within the city. We are managing a whole city, but we are very clear a whole city has different parts to it and one of those parts is about growing; without great cultural activity we are not going to grow, and people are not going to want to come and live here.

It's storytelling. I've been here nearly 30 years and over that time because of the way culture has been used in a civic setting I have seen that story change. We don't need to tell a story of deprivation, because that is what people think about Liverpool in their first breath. Instead we can tell the stories that have not been heard, the stories about resilience and joyfulness. The real moments of social justice and what makes this place tick. So yes, I do think that civic responsibility is central to my job and the cultural work we do.

When austerity came in, we did a poll and 80% cent of people said: do not shut the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic. Of course, we weren't considering shutting it down, but it shows how important cultural organisations and the cultural offer is to a place and its people. It's their Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, not the city council's and that is the key thing for councils to understand: that we are only custodians for a short period of time. It belongs to the people who pay their council tax and who live here – and who love the place.

What we've done well is to create real moments when you can come with the whole family, and tourists can come too, and you feel so proud of your city. For me it has always been about quality, not about second best. That's why we always strive to work with artists who are the best at what they do. Liverpool's people deserve the best. ■

JOE MURPHY & JOE ROBERTSON

'The Joes' are playwrights and founding artistic directors of Good Chance, a charity and nomadic theatre company which collaborates with refugee communities. Their play *The Jungle*, about the Calais refugee camp, produced by Good Chance, the National Theatre and Young Vic, has played in London, New York and San Francisco.

An intervention where it feels most needed

Joe M: We didn't go to the refugee camp in Calais to make theatre, we went to find out who was living there and where they hoped to go. We met people from 25 different countries and everyone had a different story.

Joe R: The lack of response on the part of governments and NGOs to the situation made us want to do something. The camp lacked a truly cross-cultural space, and we understood that a space where people could come together and tell their own stories in their own way was really needed.

That's how the idea of the Dome began. Good Chance didn't build the Dome, we just turned up with the poles and canvas and built it together with residents. The fact that we did it together was important. We didn't think of The Dome as having a civic role. It was born of necessity. But we quickly realised that it did have a civic purpose because it was a space that was genuinely democratic.

JM: We come from a tradition that tends to elevate the individual artist. But one of the things that became apparent to us was that the Dome wasn't just built by the people who used it, it was owned by them in every way. They programmed it and decided what would happen there. It was for them to decide, not us to impose.

JR: It's about democracy. We had some quite esteemed artists come to visit, and by the second day they would be having a bit of a melt-down. But by the end of the week they would go: "I get it, it's not all about me as an artist, it's all about the people who built this space."

JM: We started calling the Domes temporary Theatres of Hope, the hope is that people of all nationalities work together to show how we can live together and bring our own artistic traditions to the mix.

JR: It's about making a community where only different groups existed before and doing that wherever there feels a need, whether in Calais or more recently in Paris. We're operating in communities in crisis. The Domes are a beacon, a place where people can gather, a bit like the town square.

JM: The temporary nature of what we do is important to us. It's an intervention where it feels most needed. We don't want to put down

We have often talked about what we are doing as taking theatre back to its ancient roots as a place for performance, talking and debate

We could have called the Domes town halls or community arts spaces because that's what they are, but we called them temporary Theatres of Hope because that's what we think theatre can and should do: bring people to together and give them hope

roots, because we hope that a time will come when Good Chance isn't needed anymore. The arts are susceptible to being formalised and obsessed with the idea of legacy but perhaps the way to fulfil civic responsibility is to respond to public demand, need and to demonstrate art's ability to welcome people, bring them together, and then leave and move on to the next place where need has arisen.

JR: The legacy is in the spark that is created when people come together and the conversations they have that can bring about change.

JM: In Calais we realised that we were part of a network of people doing different things but to the same ends. In Calais there was a doctor and he sent people to the theatre because he saw that it helped their mental health. We talked about community building and he talked about mental health, but we were both trying to do the same thing.

JM: I have always loved war journalism, the people on the ground following what is really happening. I think that artists have to go and see for ourselves what is happening and then to get actively involved.

JR: For us there was no distinction between the work made in the Domes and making The Jungle at the Young Vic. Too many theatres have this false distinction between the work they make for their stages and what they call outreach. It is all one. We learned such a lot from the Young Vic and the way everything they do is entwined.

JM: Although often we still feel as if we are making it up as we go along. There are six of us now working for Good Chance full-time which feels quite big to us, with so many wonderful volunteers, but we are still very much a young company.

JR: And there is still so much to do. For us, need is what defines us and drives everything we do.

JR: As we have grown, new staff members have seen needs we couldn't see, and we have to get out the way and let them run with their ideas. One of the things we've learned is never to make rules about how things should be done. When we first built the Dome people constantly wanted to put up signs banning certain behaviors. But a community develops its own ways of doing things without lots of rules if you give them the space.

JM: We have often talked about what we are doing as taking theatre back to its ancient roots as a place for performance, talking and debate.

JR: We could have called the Domes town halls or community arts spaces because that's what they are, but we called them temporary Theatres of Hope because that's what we think theatre can and should do: bring people together and give them hope. ■

ALTHEA EFUNSHILE CBE

Althea is the Chair of the National College Creative Industries, Chair of Ballet Black, and a Non-Executive Director of Channel 4. She was previously Deputy Chief Executive of Arts Council England. She has held senior executive positions in the cultural and educational sectors.

What value are we adding to society?

Civic responsibility is a concept I believe in passionately. I believe that art has to be of the highest possible quality. But I also believe that through that excellent art, there is a greater purpose that artists can deliver.

There are two questions I'd always ask as a member of a Board (for example, as Chair of Ballet Black). The first is: What is the nature of our art and artistic vision – what are we presenting and performing and why? The second is: What is the difference we are trying to make to the world through doing this? That's part of the civic role. For me, if an organisation is only focussed on the first one it feels vacuous and is not fulfilling the breadth of what it could be fulfilling.

At Ballet Black, it is about ensuring that we have more diverse talent in classical ballet and a more diverse audience. Working class and black people often think that ballet is for someone else, not them. That

it's elitist. We are making a difference by changing the ballet narrative, raising aspirations and getting people to think that there is no bit of culture and society which is closed off to them. Is that a civic role of a good arts organisation? I think so. Everyone, whether they are in a building-based organisation or a touring company, can think about the nature of their art and ask what is the value that we are adding to society?

At this particular point in time – in the world, in this country, in our politics and in what is going on in society, we can't just stand back and say that art is art. Instead we must ask ourselves: what is the difference we are making to the issues that are causing so much division and fracturing of communities?

For me the Brexit vote was a tipping point because there were a number of us in arts and culture in the South who were surprised by the result. I see myself as someone who is knowledgeable about what is going on in the country, about inequality and the differences and variances of experience. But I didn't realise the felt inequality regionally was so strong and we would end up in the place we have. But when we are in a dark, difficult place, if arts and culture take their civic role seriously, they can be part of the solution, rather than a bystander.

It's that sweet spot where you are not arguing about whether its participation or excellence, not arguing about social justice or art, but just saying we need to be hitting both

Arts organisations that take their civic responsibilities seriously are co-creating and learning organisations . . . they are on the ground and they are listening. They are attuned to what is going on in their local, regional and national communities. It's hard to imagine the art that those organisations make becoming fossilised

I think there has been a shift in arts organisations embracing their civic responsibility. When I joined Arts Council England in 2007, I was quite surprised by what I perceived as the sense of entitlement to public funding that I saw in some arts organisation who just wanted to make the art that they wanted to make. But I felt change over the next decade, in part because funding was getting tighter, so it was therefore necessary to have a better and stronger argument to put to government about why the arts was deserving of funding. There was more emphasis across the sector on collaboration and resilience in organisations, and I think that there was also a need to be able to talk to a variety of funders in the language those funders might understand.

By the end of the time I was at ACE, the environment had changed sufficiently that it didn't feel organisations were kicking and screaming at being made to think about their civic role. The tired old divisions between excellence and engagement and participation were breaking down and a number were starting to see the creative advantage.

There are some organisations who have had a really good understanding of this, places such as Battersea Arts Centre and the Roundhouse. At the Roundhouse it is about helping young people to transform their lives through their creative and technical skills and to exercise their voice. At Battersea Arts Centre it is engaging with local people so that artists and the community co-create together. At Ballet Black it is about co-creation too. Co-creation requires a different way of organising the organisation, a different vocabulary and a different sense of where the art comes from. It's not *your* story, history and narrative but a shared one and therefore, as an organisation, you are learning all the time.

I believe that arts organisations that take their civic responsibilities seriously are co-creating and learning organisations; therefore they are more likely to be organisations that keep up to date and have relevance because they are on the ground and they are listening. They are attuned to what is going on in their local, regional and national communities. It's hard to imagine the art that those organisations make becoming fossilised.

When an arts organisation is civically engaged the local community is invested in it. Look what happened at Battersea Arts Centre with the fire in the Grand Hall or The Roundhouse during the riots. People rushed to support or protect them. It's a powerful testimony to the extent to which those leaders have managed to maintain the quality and integrity of the art that they produce but also manage to take their communities with them.

It's that sweet spot where you are not arguing about whether its participation or excellence, not arguing about social justice or art, but just saying we need to be hitting both and it's when we hit both we are providing something that really is magical and powerful, and others will respond too. ■

About the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation

The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation is an international charitable foundation with cultural, educational, social and scientific interests. Based in London, the UK Branch sits at the heart of a world centre for philanthropy. This enables us to deliver on the Foundation's mission using our particular skills and experience. We look ahead, thinking globally and acting locally, to create the conditions for change by connecting across borders of all kinds – national, cultural, organisational, disciplinary and social. We prioritise the vulnerable and underserved in the UK and elsewhere.

What Would Joan Littlewood Say
Published by the Calouste Gulbenkian
Foundation (UK Branch), 2019

<https://gulbenkian.pt/uk-branch>

Illustrations by Harriet Lyall

ISBN: 978-1-903080-21-4





CALOUSTE GULBENKIAN
FOUNDATION

UK BRANCH