

engage in the visual arts

Extend Leadership Programme

Case study: Lucy Medhurst

Placement: Arts Catalyst, London

The Arts Catalyst commissions contemporary art that experimentally and critically engages with science. We produce provocative, playful, risk-taking artists' projects to spark dynamic conversations about our changing world - Arts Catalyst

"I spent a total of five days with the Arts Catalyst (AC) during October 2010 as part of Extend. It was a rare opportunity to spend some time in a small arts organisation working in an interesting field of arts and science collaborations. It was fascinating to spend time as an observer in another context. I had been nervous about making a placement choice and whether it would 'work', both for me and for the host. There was some discussion about this in the residential 'surgery' where the advice was not to go to a large institution and I am very glad I reflected on this.

The organisation was set up by Director Nicola Triscott in 1993 and has recently moved to a new space on Clerkenwell Road, London. In conversations with Nicola prior to the placement we identified that the organisation was looking to investigate and pilot activities in the new space around 'experience and learning', which is the name AC gives to the education function. We agreed that I would work on a pre-application funding bid. After a conversation with Nicola to set the background and context for the bid, I also researched the organisation's history and commissions and spoke to all the members of staff. This gave me an insight into different viewpoints and roles within AC and how everyone thought about the organisation slightly differently. It is unusual to be able to have these objective conversations and to have an 'outsider' role. It was a liberating and stimulating experience to listen, think about the task and put something together on this basis.

Jo Fells, the Head of Marketing and PR gave me really useful insights into existing and potential future audience development. The current audience is largely composed of artists and to a lesser extent, scientists. Jo identified that there is a potential to develop the "culturally curious metropolitan" audience. She suggested making use of 'First Thursdays' (a monthly late opening programme for galleries in London) to list AC events and programmes in this new space. She also observed that the workshop/lab/talks and other uses of the space would require a change in working culture at AC. We also talked about physical access (the new space is on the first floor with no lift) and revenue-generating possibilities including venue hire.

Gillian Dickie, producer, spoke about the popularity of the *Interspecies* family day. She had many ideas about possible uses of the space including a professional artists' hub, mentoring for young artists, courses and artist-led activities. We spoke about socially-engaged practice and online spaces. For Gillian it was important to integrate the experience and learning function with the rest of the organisation's programme and its curatorial practice.

Shiraz Ksaiba is the Administrator. She also supports production and marketing. She felt the building represented an opportunity to engage with people in a different way, giving AC a better profile and stronger identity. Planning for activities and capacity within the new space were also issues we talked about. Shiraz also felt the website was now much more effective and had helped with marketing the organisation.

Rob La Frenais is the Curator. He also spoke about the *Interspecies* family event and felt that regular artist-led activity for artists, scientists and their children would be popular. A wealth of ideas came out of this conversation in which Nicola was also involved. The aim of developing younger audiences was strongly identified. In terms of outreach work, Nicola was keen to develop partnerships with organisations and groups who already work in areas of youth disadvantage/disengagement, health and wellbeing etc. A pilot could focus on one group or issue and develop those activities and relationships. Islington Council supports activity with family learning. AC sought to complement these programmes.

A key outcome of my placement was the production of a draft bid, work plan and budget, which Nicola will work up into a submission.

The placement has given me the opportunity to meet and speak to a range of individuals in another small but ambitious arts organisation. [My employer] Stour Valley Arts (SVA) is currently negotiating a move to a new space in Ashford on a three-year lease. The same issues about organisational profile, public visibility, engagement and revenue generation are mirrored in SVA's current thinking at a time of uncertainty and change in the UK arts funding scene. It was inspiring to see the new space transformed within a short space of time and to feel the energy about the future possibilities it offers. It was a privilege to be given this opportunity and I am very grateful to Nicola, Rob, Gillian, Jo and Shiraz for their support and generosity in hosting my placement at a busy time in AC's development. I hope that the experience and the connections made will continue to resonate for some time to come.

I would like to add that since the placement I have kept in contact with Nicola and also sent her a questionnaire about leadership and her own career development. This was in response to what other Extend alumni had done. It was extremely useful and I would recommend it to future students. I found that there were many synergies between Nicola's experience and my own. Having been on the Clore Leadership programme, she could also give insight and advice into ways I might follow up Extend in due course. I also intend to follow up the questionnaire with a meeting so that we can talk in more depth about some of the answers and the further questions these brought up for me.

This, in combination with the invaluable mentoring I received during Extend and the networks that has opened up, will carry on being useful to me. My mentor has also wanted to keep in touch."