

M4C Collaborative Doctoral Award (CDA)

PROJECT TITLE				
The Incidental Artist approach: contemporary reworkings of the methods and legacies of the Artist Placement Group 1966-1989.				
LEAD INSTITUTION				
Name of HEI institution		Birmingham City University		
Lead regional city		Birmingham <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Coventry <input type="checkbox"/>	Leicester <input type="checkbox"/>
PARTNER ORGANISATION				
Name of organisation		Flat Time House		
URL for organisation website		https://flattimeho.org.uk		
THE RESEARCH PROJECT				
To enable M4C to promote the CDA project effectively on the DTP website please can you present the information for applicants about the CDA project under the following headings:				
Project: Please ensure that the project title and project description will make sense to all readers, keep the title and description as clear and straightforward as possible.				
Process: Clearly articulate the expectations of the methods of research required to develop the project.				
Place: Focus the marketing text on telling potential applicants what will be expected of them, who they will be working with and how they will be supported.				
Person: Broadly identify the desirable knowledge, skills and experience applicants should have without using language which will discourage qualified and talented applicants.				
Project:				
How are the ideas and models developed by Artist Placement Group (1966-89) relevant today, and to future possibilities for the role of artists in society? Working with Flat Time House in London, Eastside Projects, and BCU, this project will evaluate contemporary experimental art projects, generating new understandings of APG's legacy.				
Artist Placement Group (APG) developed an innovative placement concept based on the artist as incidental person. Conceived by Barbara Steveni (then Barbara Latham) in 1965 APG was established a year later by Steveni with artists John Latham, Barry Flanagan, David Hall, Anna Ridley and Jeffrey Shaw., APG initiated and organised an innovative series of 'placements' for artists in industry or public institutions where artists would work to an 'open brief' between 1966 and 1989 (Hudek & Sainsbury 2012). The former studio and home of John Latham in London, Flat Time House (FTHo) is committed to exploring how the radicality of APG's approach and Steveni and Latham's thinking remains relevant today.				
In direct reference to the history and practices of APG, Eastside Projects (an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation in partnership with Birmingham City University) has embarked on a new programme of activity called Incidental Artists (2022-2026). Artists are invited 'to watch the doings and listen to the noises' (Latham, 1981) within a range of contexts outside of the gallery and operate over an extended period on APG's concept of the open brief. This brings the opportunity to evaluate contemporary experimentation with modes of working originated by APG and in doing so generate new understandings of the archives at FTHo and future possibilities for the role of the artist in society. This is				

particularly timely in the context of Arts Council’s current Let’s Create strategy (2020) which reflects a wider return to social practice in the arts and culture sector, and the UK Government’s Policy Lab recently launching MANIFEST (2023) as a new initiative evaluating the role of art in policy.

Key research questions:

- What relationships can be discerned between the complex nature of social practice in contemporary art today and the historical legacy of APG?
- How might APG’s motto ‘context is half the work’ be expanded upon to create a relevant approach to contemporary shifts in art making through co-producing and co-creating, given the overall decline in direct art funding?
- How can Incidental Artists mobilise APG’s legacy to work with FTHo and Eastside Projects as allies and attention magnets to become agents of wider change in a variety of contexts?

Process:

This comparative and critical study will combine art historical and archival research into APG with being an embedded researcher alongside live projects using qualitative methods of participant observation, interviews, and focus group activities. Whilst it is expected that the postgraduate researcher will nominate appropriate theoretical frameworks to their approach to the project, it is anticipated that the research will be theorised through contemporary art and cultural theory. Envisaged primarily as a critical and qualitative project, FTHo and the supervisory team are open to proposals that embed practice research through artistic and/or curatorial approaches meeting the research objectives.

Place:

The postgraduate researcher will be based at BCU’s School of Art, where a vibrant research culture includes the Art Activisms research cluster (co-led by Sian Vaughan) and an active doctoral community with regular PhD seminars and events. The project will be co-supervised by Gavin Wade, Founder-Director and Curator at Eastside Projects and Gareth Bell-Jones, Director and Curator of FTHo. The postgraduate researcher will have access to live art projects at both Eastside Projects in Birmingham and FTHo in London. They will be expected to spend time with the archives at FTHo as well as collections in Tate Archive, and FTHo will assist with some accommodation in London. Since the death of APG founder Barbara Steveni in 2020, her uncatalogued library of books has been in storage at FTHo providing the opportunity to gain collection management skills and experience through documenting the collection, as well as research insights from her annotations and marginalia in this otherwise unexplored resource.

Person:

It is anticipated that the postgraduate researcher may come from an art-historical, cultural studies, or related art practice background with the related knowledge, skills, and experience. Experience in archival research as well as interviewing and focus groups would be desirable, however additional training can be accessed at BCU and supported by supervisory expertise. Key to the project will be a critically informed passion for the potential of artists to make a difference in the world.

HOW TO FIND OUT MORE. Please email the lead university supervisor if you want to find out more about this CDA project.

Lead HEI Supervisor:	Dr Sian Vaughan
Lead HEI Supervisor Email:	<i>Sian.vaughan@bcu.ac.uk</i>