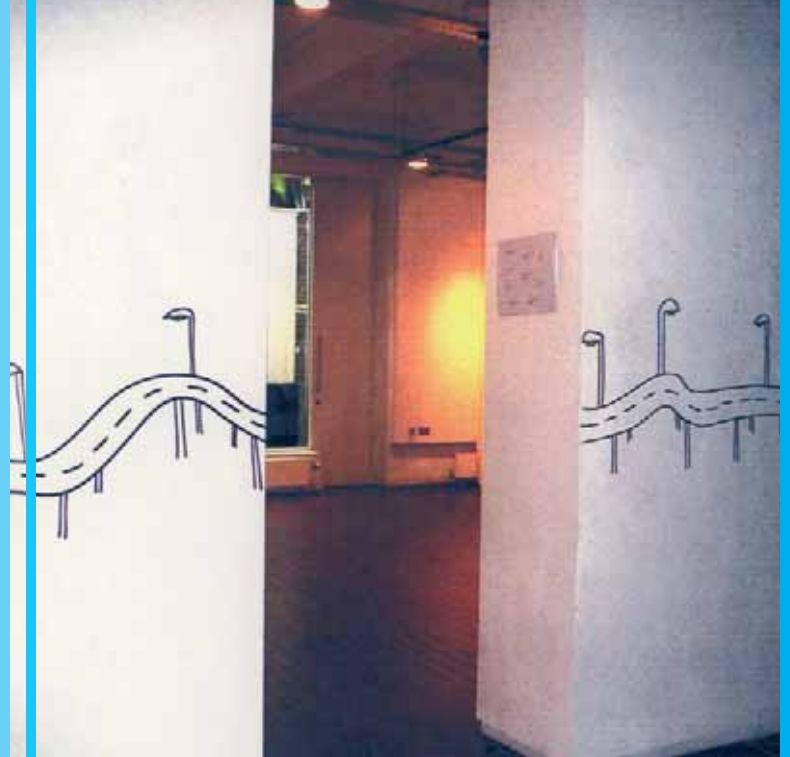


case study

Young participators
and curators at
Zion Arts, Hulme,
Manchester



partner organisations:

Manchester Art Gallery, Cornerhouse

location:

Manchester

young people:

15 young people aged 14-16, recruited mostly from Moss Side and Hulme

context:

Zion Arts is an independent youth arts centre just outside Manchester city centre with an array of spaces and resources, including a fully functional gallery and exhibition space. Whilst other art forms have been well represented visual arts is still under developed, with very limited use of the venue's gallery spaces and no dedicated staff. Zion is aiming to enhance the profile of visual arts and create a group of young people who will actively determine future projects / programming for the gallery spaces.

en-vision research question:

Why don't young people visit galleries?

project proposal:

To attract young people to become involved in participatory visual arts, and work alongside resident visual artists to curate exhibitions and develop use of Zion's galleries.

project aims:

To create a core group of young people who will actively determine and deliver future projects and programming for the gallery spaces.

summary of project activities:

- Themed participatory sessions with resident artists in Autumn and Spring time holidays to create new work for exhibition at Zion
- Exploration of the wider contemporary art scene and its relevance to young people (through contact with Manchester venues and participation in en-vision events / networks)
- Research into how other institutions / organisations approach their programming

time-scale: August 03 – Feb 04

summary of project outcomes (to date):

- Following a belated start due to illness / absence of staff at Zion, and a period of outreach, 15 young people were recruited to phase 1 of the project and participated in a week of day-long workshops in Autumn and Spring term holidays working alongside 2 visual artists
- The group were involved in a range of practical activities – making stretchers for a canvas, painting, sculpture, installation, and also had the opportunity to experience 'the other side' of being an artist, using log books, carrying out research, creating and curating an exhibition of work by themselves and the facilitating artist at Zion, organizing refreshments for the preview night and marketing the exhibition
- The project experienced staffing problems throughout and did not address its full aspirations within the lifetime of the pilot,

though the project that took place offered an inspirational creative experience to a group of young people and resulted in a series of recommendations made to the venue about future development of the gallery space

developments and changes from original proposal:

- A researcher was commissioned to produce a consultation report making recommendations about how Zion might develop its visual arts programme / gallery space

learning outcomes – gallery / venue specific:

- That contact needs to be maintained with young people between projects if there is a gap in activities to maintain their interest.
- That a dedicated member of staff should ideally be employed to run the gallery and manage visual arts workshops
- That the current practice of booking the gallery spaces out to outside groups for non arts purposes is damaging to both the space itself and young people's perceptions of the creative value of the gallery
- That visual arts needs to be assigned the status of other art forms (eg dance) within the organisation and visibly within the building
- That Zion youth arts centre has enormous advantage in its neighbourhood location, and in the fact that it is not an institution such as Lowry or Manchester Art Gallery, resulting in young people being more likely to feel at home
- The member of staff managing the project at Zion felt that in retrospect the organisation did not have the capacity to invest effectively in the en-vision pilot
- Meetings with Manchester venue partners and attendance at en-vision training events was felt to have been a valuable experience in learning how other galleries operate, the issues they face, and in providing opportunities for networking and sharing, although this was an area of work which could have been capitalised on much further

challenges:

- staffing problems – not being able to redirect much needed financial and staff resources to the project as a whole
- Keeping to the original proposed timings for the project

outcomes for young people:

- The group achieved much in a relatively short period – they learnt many practical skills and gained an insight into other professional skills required as professional artists, curators, project organisers and promoters

outcomes for the venue:

- The project manager felt that the most successful aspects for the gallery have been the method and results of the recruitment activity and the forming of a group of young people with a long term interest in influencing and directing the visual arts activity and exhibition programme at Zion

what next?

- During the en-vision pilot a review of Zion's gallery space was carried out by the City Council on behalf of Zion, which, alongside the current organisational review, will be used to inform future development. (Bradley, C., 2004, @Zion Arts Gallery Development')
- Zion are committed to creating a dedicated visual arts post and are keen to make links within the gallery sector to further develop this work