

STREET ARTS IN SCOTLAND

A Position Paper written by STREETNET
for submission to Scotland's Cultural Commission
January 2005

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This position paper has been prepared by STREETNET, the Scottish Street Arts Network¹ on behalf of those the network represents: street artists living and working in Scotland². This is the first stage in the preparation of a more extensive strategy document³ which will assist cultural planners, local authorities, funders, festival programmers and promoters to better understand the strength, diversity and growing maturity of this vibrant strand of Scotland's cultural life.

In Scotland, there is an active and rapidly developing streets arts community, producing high quality, exciting and accessible work for the people that live here. The street arts sector has grown enormously in the last ten years, with companies forming, some becoming fully professional, new work being created, festivals becoming established, audiences growing and bigger visions for the future being imagined. Outside of festivals and the more visible aspects of street performance, street artists provide a range of educational services for communities and schools across Scotland whilst some entertain the corporate sector.

Although widespread, popular and increasingly established, street arts do not yet feature in any published Scottish national cultural strategy⁴ &⁵. Neither are they mentioned in any local or regional cultural strategy. This is beginning to change. Edinburgh City Council will shortly publish its new Theatre Strategy which will be the first such document in the country to consider streets arts as a distinct area of cultural provision.

The Cultural Commission offers the street arts sector a valuable opportunity to raise its profile within Scotland at a key time in the sector's development. The coming years will see a continuation of the growth of the sector and an increasing presence of street arts on Scotland's cultural landscape.

This document sets out to do the following:

- Provide a definition of street arts
- Describe street arts in Scotland
- Discuss the accessibility of street arts
- Present a vision of the future for street arts in Scotland
- Lay out the elements needed to achieve this vision

¹ STREETNET was created in 2002 in response to the need for street artists to communicate more closely and share information on matters of common concern, eg professional development, showcasing of new work, health and safety. STREETNET now has 85 members, some of whom represent companies rather than individuals.

² This position document does not encompass the perspective of street arts promoters since STREETNET is, by design, an artists' network. STREETNET does, however, fully recognise the contribution that promoters, particularly UZ Events and Unique Events, have played in bringing street arts to Scotland. Audiences now have the opportunity to see some of the best of the world's companies, as well as home grown work, through the street arts programming of festivals such as Big in Falkirk, Edinburgh's Hogmanay, Burns and Ae' That, Ayr and Merchant City Festival, Glasgow.

³ The time available to work on this document has not been sufficient for it to be fully comprehensive although it is nonetheless an accurate snapshot of Scottish street arts today.

⁴ The National Cultural Strategy published by the Scottish Executive in 2000 included several photographs showing street arts and related art forms (eg carnival) but did not mention this sector at all within the text. Scottish Arts Council has no written strategy which includes street arts although increasingly recognises the importance of this art form to Scotland's cultural life.

⁵ Not directly relevant to Scotland but nonetheless useful - with respect to providing valuable background information - is "Strategy and Report on Street Arts" by Felicity Hall published by Arts Council England in 2002.

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STREET ARTS DEFINED

Street arts are quite simply live arts of all kinds performed for free in public spaces. The diversity of art forms they embrace is far wider than the common perception of the lone juggler entertaining a crowd with witty repartee and clever tricks. Street art performances involve combinations of drama, comedy, circus skills, puppetry (large and small), dance, music, pyrotechnics and even film. Performances are presented by companies of all sizes from a single artist to a company working with a cast and crew of dozens. Likewise, audiences range from small groups of passersby caught unawares to festival crowds of more than 10,000.

By taking work outside of buildings and into very public domains, street arts are performed in an almost infinite variety of settings. In recent years, STREETNET members have performed in village squares and city centres, on streets and in car parks, under bridges and on docksides, in conference centres and shopping malls, up towers and on walls, in parks and deep inside forests, on industrial estates and on beaches, fields and mountains.

This diversity makes street arts hard to define (but also what makes them exciting) since there is no single art form or location common to performances⁶. What does unify street arts is the relationship these arts have with their audiences – the knowledge that if the work is not skilful and entertaining, audience members can simply walk away.

STREET ARTS IN SCOTLAND

Within Europe, street arts are a popular, vibrant contemporary art form and are considered a mature element of cultural provision. Horsiesmurs⁷, the French government-funded organisation dedicated to providing information about the sector in Europe publishes several directories listing the details of festivals, companies, creation centres, circus schools and service providers. These directories are a powerful indication of the maturity of street arts in Europe.

Although less evident, modern street arts have been present in Scotland for several decades and draw on a long historical tradition, from wandering storytellers to Mummers' plays and Mystery Plays. The earliest forms of theatre in Scotland – pageants and street processions - were all forms of street arts which still influence arts activity in Scotland today: the annual Samhuinn Fire Festival procession down Edinburgh's Royal Mile draws its influence directly from these early traditions⁸.

A time line of street arts activity in Scotland drawn up by STREETNET members⁹, shows that for the current generation of performers/practitioners the earliest known activity took place in the early 1970s. This was the Suitcase Circus initiated by Reg Bolton, then director of Theatre Workshop in Edinburgh. Reg organised a series of circus skills workshops in local communities across the city which sparked a renowned global movement of community circus projects based on this original model.

Growth within the sector was slow and patchy until the late 1980s when more opportunities to present work became available and a global interest in street arts began to filter into Scotland. For example, Street Biz in Glasgow in 1988 was one of the first programmed events for local buskers and other street entertainers whilst Edinburgh's Hogmanay brought many fine, inspirational French companies on to the streets of the capital city (although few opportunities for Scottish artists to present their work until recently).

⁶ A fuller definition of street arts is attached as Appendix One – taken from Hall's "Strategy and Report on Street Arts"

⁷ For further information, please go to: www.horsiesmurs.asso.fr

⁸ Samhuinn is the old Celtic New Year celebration now known as Halloween and takes place on 31 October. Goloshan plays in various forms were traditional features of Samhuinn (and later, Hogmanay), only dying out early in the 20th Century.

⁹ The timeline was drawn up by the 50 participants of the first STREETNET conference in March 2004.

Meanwhile, Edinburgh's Beltane Fire Festival¹⁰ nurtured in its flames many budding performers and the birth of a local street arts community throughout the 1990s (a function it still fulfils today) and provided the impetus for several community-based street arts projects.

There is now much evidence within the STREETNET community and beyond of the growing maturity of street arts in Scotland. One of the most compelling evidence is the existence of fully professional companies that have been working in Scotland for over five years, some for as long as twenty (Big Rory). Although only few in number, these companies are increasingly capable of creating high quality work of export quality. To date no survey has been carried out on the strength and health of Scottish companies as has been the case in England¹¹. This would be a useful exercise to undertake at some stage as it would provide a more accurate picture of the contribution of this sector to cultural provision in Scotland.

Some companies have been and are currently in receipt of public funding from the Scottish Arts Council (SAC) and other funding bodies such as Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Glasgow City Council and Edinburgh City Council specifically for producing street arts. There is growing recognition by funders and policy makers that street arts reach audiences missed out by current live arts providers and attract audiences that hesitate to enter formal cultural spaces such as theatres and concert halls.

Publicly funded companies in Scotland include STREETNET members Mischief la-Bas, Boilerhouse and te POOKa, all of whom are taking their work across Scotland and overseas. Individual practitioners have also received money from the SAC towards professional development in street arts disciplines.

The Scottish Arts Council is strongly committed to developing outdoor performance in Scotland through provision of training and funding opportunities.

David Taylor, Head of Drama, Scottish Arts Council¹²

Two Scottish companies - Boilerhouse and Mischief La-Bas - are in receipt of IN SITU awards, a remarkable achievement for Scotland given the stiff competition. IN SITU is a network of six key European street arts promoters¹³ which is funding the creation of nine new street art projects from across Europe with the support of Culture 2000. These awards are another indicator of the ability within Scotland to produce street art of international standing. The two works which have been created with the support of IN SITU funding are *PAINFUL CREATURES* by Mischief La-Bas and *3600* by Boilerhouse Theatre Company.

PAINFUL CREATURES was premiered in early 2004 following initial development the previous year. Audiences of around 2000 a night witnessed a kaleidoscope of strange characters that peopled this performance installation as it toured to festivals across Europe including La Strada in Graz, Austria, Viva Cité in Sotteville-Rouen, France, Streets of Brighton, England and Bradford Festival, England.

We are delighted that Mischief La-Bas has been awarded an In-Situ grant for further development of Painful Creatures, and are confident that this company will be an excellent ambassador for Scotland across Europe."

David Taylor, Head of Drama, Scottish Arts Council¹²

¹⁰ See www.beltane.org for more information about this world famous event.

¹¹ See section on the *Importance of Street Arts* in Appendix One: "Strategy and Report on Street Arts"

¹² Taken from a letter to Mischief La-Bas

¹³ The six IN SITU members are: Lieux Publics, France's National Creation Centre for Street Arts, Marseille; Atelier 231, a creation centre in Sotteville-Rouen, France; Antwerpen en Zomer, a two-month programme of all arts for the city which places particular emphasis on street arts, Belgium; La Strada, a festival in Graz, Austria; UZ Events, street arts programmers, Glasgow, Scotland; and Fundacion Municipal de Cultura de Valladolid, programmers in Valladolid, Spain. Further information about the network can be found on: www.in-situ.info

3600" is a unique co-production with French street artists Metalvoice which is being created in early 2005. The production will premiere at Big in Falkirk, Scotland in May 2005 and then tour Europe including Monaco and Chalon-dans-la-rue, the latter being one of the most important French street arts festivals.

In September 2004, Boilerhouse performed *THE BRIDGE*, its aerial spectacular to an audience of 7,000 in one night and 11,000 the next at Les Accroches-Coeurs Festival, Angers, France, surely one of the largest single audiences a Scottish theatre company has ever achieved!

Other companies too have performed outside Scotland: te POOKa, Big Rory, Human Product and their individual members have played festivals around the world and are being increasingly requested to take their work outside of Scotland. In addition, Mischief la-Bas have recently toured Venezuela at the invitation of the British Council.

Meanwhile, there has been a substantial increase in new street arts practitioners based in Scotland over the last ten years despite the lack of professional training available here (see below for further discussion). Many of these people have developed their passion through involvement in circus skills practice groups such as the Tollcross State Circus, Edinburgh, the Arches Circus School, Glasgow and the Stirling Juggling Society. Their ingenuity, hard work, collectivism and commitment to street arts has resulted in the formation of new companies, the creation of public events and the beginnings of future circus schools.

In recent months, the circus-based cabaret Vaudeville has been launched, programming its first event entirely with Scotland-based performers, a policy it intends to continue.

ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION

The Cultural Policy Statement issued by the Scottish Executive states that access shall be one of the guiding principles of the new approach to cultural policy. STREETNET and its members believe that street arts offer democratic access to the arts through two distinct means: Public Performance and Participation.

Public Performance

Street arts almost always take place in public spaces free of charge. As a result, they can be unexpectedly encountered by the public as they go about their daily lives (although much street art is programmed in to events). Unlike many other artforms, audience members are not required to enter an institutionalised space to experience the work. The taking of work directly to audiences is one of the primary features of street arts and one which makes them uniquely accessible to all. This accessibility is one of the reasons for the non-elitist perception of street arts and a cornerstone in facilitating everyone's right to culture.

In France, where the "right to culture" is enshrined in the national conscience, street arts are a fundamental means of meeting this right. This is undoubtedly why France has the most developed street arts sector in Europe: almost every city and town has its own festival, fully endorsed and resourced by the local town council; audiences are massive and are made up of people from across the entire social spectrum; companies and artists abound, supported by creation centres, circus schools and plenty of rehearsal space donated by local government.

Street arts events in Scotland are regularly attended by large audiences and are growing in popularity. This does not necessarily constitute populism. 'Populism' implies allowing the prevailing tastes of the public to influence the creative process. While street artists do aim to entertain their audiences, there are many examples of street arts productions that challenge preconceptions and offer an emotive artistic experience.

Audience research has shown that non-attenders commonly perceive the arts to be for the benefit of the "social elite". In contrast, English studies¹⁴ have shown street arts, circus and carnival to be the only art forms that readily attract audiences from across all economic classes and age ranges. There is a lack of comparative studies for Scotland and the only data available is informal reporting from festivals and companies to their stakeholders. This information, once collated, would provide definitive proof of the attractiveness and accessibility of street arts to diverse audiences.

Participation

In addition to performing, many street arts practitioners (including significant numbers of STREETNET members) teach their skills in schools and a range of community settings, both for the pleasure in passing on skills and as a livelihood.

Because of its non-elitist perception and the plain fact that it is great fun, the learning of street arts skills is particularly attractive to new practitioners. Basic circus skills can be taught to and practiced by people of all ages from 7 years old upwards. Anecdotal evidence from tutors, practitioners and their parents/carers suggests that such training promotes confidence, self-esteem, concentration, co-ordination and social skills as well as improving physical fitness.

There is now recognition that PE classes need to offer non-team based and non-competitive physical activities for those children and young people (particularly young women) who are put off by traditional PE activities. This is where activities such as dance and circus skills play a vital role since the end goal of these physical skills is not to 'win' but to 'perform for others'. The only person one is in competition with is oneself.

Circus skills workshops can be organised at relatively low cost. Funding has been made available to local authorities across Scotland (through the New Opportunities Fund) to support circus skills training for young people. As a result, circus skills workshops are becoming a popular feature of schools' extracurricular programmes and community events.

The perception of street arts as non-elitist facilitates ready participation by young people from disadvantaged communities in performance projects. For example, The Arches Circus School brought together disadvantaged teenagers from care homes and special needs schools with the youth organisation of Scottish Opera in a highly successful collaboration.

Participation in circus skills and street arts workshops also encourages local groups to create celebratory events within their own and neighbouring communities. Edinburgh City Council's Go For It summer programme included a circus school whose graduates went on to form the independent group Mundilfari who are now performing at community events in the city. Similar groups are springing up across the country with the support of street artists. Caparundi was formed in Badenoch and Strathspey after te POOKa ran a series of workshops in the region in 1997-98. Caparundi now organises its own street processions, mini festivals and street performances with its team of young stilt-walkers and fire performers dancing to the rhythms of Caparundi's samba band.

Training in street arts and circus are also a gateway into a career in performance (all types, not just street arts). From local community groups, circus skills clubs and elsewhere will come future performers and artists provided that there are opportunities for them to train, to create, to collaborate, to be inspired and to present their work. For the street arts sector to flourish, these opportunities need to be in Scotland, else these potential artists will either give up or go elsewhere to develop their careers.

¹⁴ See Hall's "Strategy and Report on Street Arts" and her other document written for Arts Council England, "Strategy and Report on Circus".

THE FUTURE OF STREET ARTS IN SCOTLAND

Scotland is already capable of supporting a small street arts sector that supports artists of international standard, provides extensive education and training opportunities to the public and regularly collaborates with artists from other art forms. One of the sector's greatest strengths is its growing sense of community which allows for free discussion, skill sharing, mentoring of new practitioners and companies, the pooling of resources, self-initiation of professional development projects and collaboration between practitioners.

The street arts community is already capable of producing perspectives on its own strategic development through STREETNET, a democratic, web-based group which represents a significant proportion of street artists based in Scotland. These perspectives can make a valuable contribution to cultural planning, particularly as they stem from not just one individual/company.

Where resources are in short supply for street arts, it is vital that there is strategic consideration to their deployment to ensure long-term sustainability for the sector. For instance, there is a feasibility study currently being undertaken for a creation centre for Falkirk. Creation centres are resourced spaces (normally incorporating rehearsal space, workshops for large-scale set building, sound studios and living space) that facilitate the development and creation of new work and are a key support structure for street arts in France.

A creation centre would be a fantastic resource for any region (and STREETNET supports the concept of a future creation centre in Scotland) but if it is unable to be used by local companies because there is no/insufficient funding for projects or there is no market for the resulting work, then a creation centre may not bring its promised benefits and may absorb valuable resources that could be better employed elsewhere.

Street arts could make a greater contribution to cultural provision in Scotland than at present with the right resources, including those generated by the street arts community itself and those coming from funders, local authorities and other stakeholders. Additionally, Scottish companies and artists could become more significant participants in the international street arts community.

STREETNET envisions a future where Scottish-based artists and companies regularly create vibrant new work of high technical and artistic quality which excites both Scottish and international audiences. To achieve this vision and to continue developing the street arts sector along its current positive path, a number of the sector's current needs must be met, principally the following:

- Training and professional development
- Rehearsal space
- Financial support
- Opportunities to perform
- Self-regulation
- Networking

Training

The lack of training institutions in Scotland for physical theatre and circus limits the technical abilities of Scottish-based artists. The result is that once a certain skill level has been reached¹⁵, practitioners either get stuck in a rut, give up their dreams or leave Scotland to train elsewhere, for example Circus Space in London, Circomedia in Bristol or destinations overseas. Once they have left, many choose not to return as there are more employment opportunities for street artists and circus performers in places like southern England.

The number of highly skilled street/circus performers in Scotland is undoubtedly reduced by the fact there are no courses here but is also exacerbated by the almost non-existent opportunities for professional development for those that wish to be based in Scotland. This is partly due to the lack

¹⁵ Circus skills groups and informal training in Scotland, although valuable catalysts for improvement are no substitute for full-time, professional training. This is particularly the case for aerial skills (which includes trapeze, corde lisse, the use of silks etc).

of training and rehearsal facilities (see below) although the lack of funds to pay highly skilled trainers to come regularly to Scotland to run courses (let alone support trainers permanently based in Scotland) also restricts opportunity.

It is important to point out that it is not only professional artists who suffer from the lack of training opportunities in Scotland. Without professional development of artists, there is a knock-on effect on the ability of the sector to offer quality training to children and young people, some of whom will form the next generation of street artists. And for those who are sufficiently enthused to consider street arts as a career, the opportunity to work intensively on short-term courses may well be the key in encouraging them to take the next step in becoming professional.

There are now enough practitioners to warrant investment in professional development. The key question is how best to do this given the currently available resources. One obvious short-term solution is to bring in trainers from outside of Scotland to run intensive short courses in the skill areas where there is most demand. Longer-term solutions require more consideration, particularly given the shortage of suitable training and rehearsal space.

Rehearsal Space

When asked what was the biggest limitation on the development of new work (other than the obvious lack of funding), most of the participants at the STREETNET conference stated that it was access to suitable spaces in which to work. Some activities can be undertaken in such places as church halls but certain disciplines such as trapeze and related aerial skills require dedicated spaces with sufficient height and suitably strong structures to support aerial rigging.

As discussed above, a creation centre would be fantastic for Scotland but the greater current need is for more localised resources which allow constant, regular access for practitioners to train and rehearse. These spaces would also be a valuable community resource and would facilitate the provision of more circus skills workshops for the general public.

This is where local authorities can play a role in supporting the street arts sector: by assisting companies in accessing suitable spaces. These spaces do not have to be purpose-built, fully-equipped buildings – they could simply be a secure, dry space, cheap to rent and available for consistent use with perhaps a beam suitable for rigging a trapeze. There must be plenty of such spaces in Scotland that are currently underused which could well serve the street arts community and the wider public.

Financial Support

Companies and individuals involved in street arts in Scotland often support their artistic activities with income earned from the corporate sector. This enables practitioners to work without significant support from funding bodies and provides the sector with an enviable degree of self-sufficiency. The downside of this is that corporate clients usually request only certain types of performance that represent a small part of an individual's/company's repertoire of skills. Corporate clients are also unwilling to book experimental work or pieces that are too challenging or content-driven. Thus this kind of work limits the growth of artists by constantly demanding entertainment-orientated work. Focusing on corporate employment also gives the practitioner little time to devote to their own artistic development.

To encourage the creation of original work and professional development of practitioners, funds need to be more easily available to support these processes. Street arts are not a widely recognised category of artistic activity so artists can face difficulty in accessing funds. There is also a lack of experience and expertise within funding bodies as to the nature and benefits of street arts. This is notably not the case with the Scottish Arts Council¹⁶ despite the lack of reference to

¹⁶ Arts Council England has, in addition to its published strategies, a dedicated officer for street arts and another for circus and carnival. Arts Council Ireland has just advertised the newly created post of Street Arts, Circus and Spectacle Specialist to complement the existing post of Events and Festivals Programmer. It is worthwhile reflecting on the fact that Ireland has a similarly sized population to Scotland.

street arts in the current Drama Strategy. However, this omission means that street arts retain an unwarranted low status in the cultural sector as a whole.

Another source of financial support is commissioning of new work by festivals and promoters. Big in Falkirk, run by UZ Events is the only festival in Scotland doing so at present. Commissioning can be a very positive experience for companies as the support offered can be more than just financial. There may be assistance in securing tour dates; there may be technical advice or marketing support. However, companies need to be fairly established and proficient before they are commissioned as there must be some guarantee that the resulting work will be of sufficient quality to programme sight-unseen.

There is some fear that commissioning by promoters gives them too much control since they then are in the position to decide both who gets resources to create work and who gets to perform, particularly in Scotland where the sector is very small. To counteract this unnecessarily negative perception, it is vital that commissioning promoters do not abuse this position and become more aware of the burgeoning potential of Scottish artists to create quality work.

Opportunities to Perform

The evolution of funding practices to give more specialised support to street arts will need to run parallel with an increase in opportunities to show work – there are few festivals and events in Scotland currently able to adequately programme street arts, particularly larger scale work. Companies are therefore very dependent on the ability and willingness of only a couple of promoters to book work.

This relationship becomes critical where funding is tied in with performing a particular number of dates in Scotland. Any changes to this relationship leaves companies very vulnerable. The failure, for whatever reason¹⁷, by a company to perform a sufficient number of dates to meet the targets stated in a funding proposal potentially impacts on the company's ability to attract future funding from the same source.

More festivals and promoters need to book work produced in Scotland. To facilitate this, festivals and promoters require the kind of training and support in event management that has been already provided in Scotland by ISAN – the Independent Street Arts Network¹⁸. And naturally, there has to be money available for promoters to book companies. Promoters also need to become more aware of the work that is already being produced by Scottish companies since there is still a lingering perception that Scotland does not have its own street artists.

Street arts companies themselves have to become more aware of how to attract more bookings, particularly from outside of Scotland¹⁹. The quality of the work being offered to promoters has to be of high quality and to be presented and marketed professionally. Developing critical self-awareness of the quality of their work is a key requirement if companies are to succeed.

Some companies benefit from presenting their work at the annual show case events²⁰ attended by promoters from across the UK and abroad. Show cases are somewhat controversial but are a key means of selling street art to a wider market.

¹⁷ These reasons may be outwith the control of a company, for example, bad weather causing cancellation, change in programming policy by the promoter or festival organiser, failure of promoter to raise enough money to meet the costs of their planned programme etc

¹⁸ This is a UK-wide network for promoters and bookers of street artists which is part-funded by Arts Council England. ISAN has published a series of useful reports including one on health and safety at street events and another on commissioning large-scale work. Further information is available via their website www.streetartsnetwork.org.uk

¹⁹ Because the market is limited in Scotland, professional street arts companies need to perform outside of Scotland to be financially viable, particularly if they are wishing to avoid complete reliance on corporate income.

²⁰ Scotland does not currently have a show case festival. Only two are recognised as such in the UK: Streets of Brighton and x.trax in Manchester.

The internet is fast becoming a valuable marketing tool for street arts. To take advantage of this, STREETNET is developing a website²¹ that will allow promoters and bookers to find acts more quickly by offering a comprehensive directory of street artists and companies in Scotland. The directory will include information about each company with a link to their own website.

Although some Scottish companies are now fully professional, others need support to enable them to work consistently at this level. This could be done through mentoring by experienced individuals already based in Scotland and through STREETNET as well as through existing training offered by the Independent Theatre Council (ITC) and similar bodies.

Self-Regulation

The world in which street artists operate is becoming increasingly regulated, particularly with respect to health and safety. Although this is a necessary requirement to ensure high standards of health and safety are maintained for performers and audience members alike, the fear is that performances and events will soon become so restricted by regulations that it will no longer be possible to produce the spectacular productions that so excite audiences (and everyone involved in creating them). Increased regulation as well as the related massive increases in insurance premiums²² have become major issues for street artists.

To work within relevant safety standards with no loss of performance quality, the street arts sector needs to do two things:

- making sure that practitioners are highly trained (another reason why professional training and development is so necessary in Scotland); and
- it must become involved in the setting and regulating of these standards.

In the UK, the street arts/circus sector has already become aware of the need to do this rather than passively wait for standards to be decided by outside agencies with poor understanding of the way the industry works. This is particularly the case for aerial work where there is inherent risk simply because it takes place above the ground. However, the risks can be considerably reduced by ensuring that practitioners are highly trained, adequately rehearsed, fit and fully prepared before performing. What is perceived as dangerous by the audience is actually an illusion because of the high skill level of the practitioner working within well-established safety limits.

ISAN has taken a lead with respect to event management by producing its guide to health and safety for street events in the absence of suitable guidelines²³. It is hoped that this becomes widely recognised as the industry standard and will bring some much needed common sense in to the management of street arts festivals. Self-regulation and internal production of industry standards by the pyrotechnics industry over the last ten years has already shown itself to be a successful. This has included the establishment of industry-run training and certification where none previously existed. Bodies such as STREETNET could facilitate the development of industry standards for street arts and circus by working closely with practitioners and other peer groups within Britain such as the UK Street Artists' Network²⁴, RICSAT (Rigging In Circus Standards And Training) and The Circus Arts Forum. Although not currently a function of STREETNET, this is something its steering group is seriously considering.

²¹ This website will also include a members-only section which will provide downloads of guides and proformas (such as contracts) to facilitate the administration and management of street arts companies. Some of these documents are already available to STREETNET members through its email group services.

²² For example, Boilerhouse's insurance premiums jumped from £1,500 to £10,500 in one year following the company's move into aerial work. It took three months to find an underwriter willing to insure the company for this work. Other companies and community groups have had similar problems in securing insurance for work perceived as risky including anything to do with fire or work above the ground. In recent years, more than one event has had to be cancelled because the insurance premiums were too steep.

²³ The events industry standard work for health and safety is HMSO's purple guide but the emphasis is on rock concerts and therefore not an entirely appropriate reference for organisers of street arts events.

²⁴ UK Street Artists' Network or USAN was created in 2003, partly inspired by the success of STREETNET. It fulfils a similar role to STREETNET in that it is a network for artists but its remit is UK-wide.

Networking

Networking can assist the development of a sector by providing artists/practitioners with a strong, common voice and a means of sharing information and resources. The internet has given networks a rapid and egalitarian method of communication which has revolutionised their way of working.

STREETNET and USAN are both informal internet-based groups which allow all their members an equal voice (although some are always more vocal than others) and full opportunity to become involved in debates. These debates can result in enough material being generated to produce discussion documents for wider distribution. USAN has already tapped into debates in this way by presenting a conference paper²⁵ that collated the views of its members on proposed creation centres following an on-line debate. It was a valuable contribution to the conference as it accessed the otherwise-untapped opinions of over 20 companies, including the largest and most long-standing in the UK, all of which are possible users of creation centres.

The groups listed above have the following important features:

- they provide vital peer-to-peer support
- they are self-defining and self regulating
- they are welcoming and supportive of new practitioners

In the future, these groups may become more formalised, particularly if they take a role in the self-regulation of the industry in which they work.

Peer networks can democratically select their own representatives who can work with decision-making bodies and those responsible for strategic development to ensure the views of their community are known. STREETNET has taken the opportunity offered by the Cultural Commission to achieve this and is seeking other similar means of raising the profile of street arts in Scotland. STREETNET encourages its individual members to become involved in relevant local consultation exercises. This has already borne fruit: the forthcoming Edinburgh Theatre Strategy mentions street arts for the first time simply because Edinburgh-based street arts companies made sure their views were heard.

Perhaps the most valuable thing STREETNET has done to date was organise a two-day conference for its members. This was a vital step in developing a real sense of community among street artists in Scotland as well as aiding the identification of areas for priority development within the sector. STREETNET will organise similar events in the future as their worth is already proven.

Another type of networking is achieved by bringing practitioners together to meet face-to-face. This could be done by providing spaces at street arts festivals where practitioners can meet as is regularly done at French festivals. This fosters the sense of community and encourages closer working together, artistically and strategically.

In all these ways, networks can more readily involve artists in cultural planning and strategic development, processes many artists have avoided in the past because it seemed impossible for individual voices, unless particularly strident, to be heard.

CLOSING STATEMENT

Scotland's street arts community has immense potential to positively contribute to Scotland's cultural landscape. Steps being taken by the community itself to regulate standards and create support networks will help it develop but progress will be slowed if there is not increased acknowledgement and support from cultural planners, strategists, funders and promoters. STREETNET and its members believe that the appeal of street arts is unique and universal and that Scottish companies create stimulating work for the Scottish public and the rest of the world. Scotland can and will have a thriving and internationally recognised streets arts sector; it is simply a question of how soon.

²⁵ The paper is attached as Appendix Two to this document.

APPENDIX ONE: Extracts from "Strategy and Report for Street Arts"²⁶

Definition of street arts

Street arts encompasses dance, music, circus, pyrotechnics, theatre, comedy and spectacle. It has a diversity of practitioners using many forms from situationist street theatre to samba musicians and large-scale puppets, and it has been used as a form of political performance as well as a focus for participatory work. It can include work that relies on a situational comedic image eg – gardeners walking triffids through a shopping centre. It is work that can be happened upon by the audience, particularly in festivals such as X-Trax in Manchester, Stockton International Riverside or the Streets of Brighton, or it can form a large-scale destination event, such as Improbable's Sticky at Purley Way for the Croydon Festival

Street arts takes place outside in sites that do not have the usual signifiers of a performance space, such as formal seating, lighting or staging. It takes places in streets, parks, shopping centres, and markets and can be site specific, ambulatory or static. One of the elements that makes street arts so exceptional is its ability to defamiliarise the surroundings of its audience, and to provide a juxtaposition of the mundane with the bizarre, political, rhythmic or absurd. The effect can be comedic, moving, engaging, intriguing or thought provoking according to the piece and the intentions of the artist. Promoters frequently use street arts to help provoke a common bond and celebration in the audience.

The relationship any piece of street arts has with its audience will always differ from the relationship that more formally staged pieces have. Street arts audiences can always, and often will, walk away from work if it does not engage them sufficiently. Work that is happened upon by chance, as is often the case with street arts, creates different expectations in the audience. The audience is participating in an event within a specific situation, and in a specific spatial context, in a way that is qualitatively different from the way in which a theatre audience relates to a play. It is the freer relationships with the audience, and with the environment, which cannot be controlled that are the defining characteristics of street arts. The challenges that come from these relationships, and the opportunities for spontaneity that they present, provide a depth of inspiration and stimulation for the artist that more traditional forms often cannot.

The importance of street arts

Street arts, which covers a wide variety of forms including music, circus, pyrotechnics, theatre and dance, is usually found programmed as a free event within non-traditional performance spaces. Street arts are an effective way of animating spaces for festivals and community events, and form an increasingly important part of programming for local events, as well as regionally and nationally significant events. These include Greenwich and Docklands International Festival, as well as dedicated street arts festivals such as X-Trax, Winchester Hat Fair, Stockton International Riverside Festival and Zap Production's Streets of Brighton, among others.

By its nature, street arts provide access to artists and performance for audiences who would not normally enter traditional performance spaces, and so assumes an important significance particularly in the area of regeneration. Animation of a space in this way has been clearly recognised, particularly by local authorities, as an effective way of addressing issues of access, especially for socially excluded groups. Additionally street arts have been used extensively by local authorities and regeneration bodies to provide positive cultural profile for specific areas, and as a key driver for regenerating a variety of urban spaces.

The audience for street arts is significant. A recent pilot study (2001) carried out by social survey division of the Office for National Statistics indicates that over a 12 month period, 18% of respondents had attended street art, carnival or circus compared to 22% at a play or drama, 11% at pantomime and 10% at a dance event. The survey also showed that 23% were 16–24 year-olds and 25% were 25–34 year-olds. The survey also shows that there were 'no noticeable class

²⁶ Written by Felicity Hall, 2002 for Arts Council England.

differences in attendance for... street arts' (as well as carnival and circus), which is to be expected given the nature of street arts sites, in particular, and in these artforms generally.

The Jermyn survey notes that estimating audiences for street arts can be problematic. This is due to the number of performances taking place outside at free events where the absence of sales also means the absence of data. Many of the respondents indicated that their audience figures were estimates.

However, taking the lack of ticket sale hard data into account, there is clearly a strong appetite for street arts from audiences. For the 77 street arts companies and artists who responded to the Jermyn survey, audiences over a 30-week period typically totalled 30,000 with 25% of respondents reporting audiences of over 100,000.

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The demand for the work provided by this sector is indicated by the fact that over three-quarters of companies (78%) had been established for more than five years, and the majority of independent artists (79%) had worked in this area for more than five years. Over half of respondents (52%) were either independent artists who had worked in the sector for 10 years or more, or companies established at least 10 years ago. Although the survey illustrates various instances of fragility within the sector, clearly street arts, as an artform, are sustainable in terms of demand from artists and audiences.

APPENDIX TWO: Reportback on Creation Centre Questionnaire²⁷

First of all, I need to give some background to the questionnaire and how it arose...

USAN, ie UK Street Arts Network was formed nearly a year ago when it became apparent that those involved in creating and performing street art would benefit from closer contact with each other. In addition to becoming a very valuable means of communication and information dissemination on subjects as diverse as insurance and where to park up lorries, it has become an obvious forum for discussing the strategic development of our sector from an artist's perspective. This not only includes creation centres but wider issues of professional development/training, access to markets, the pros and cons of showcasing, the impact of growing health and safety measures and the perennial matter of money to sustain us.

At present, USAN represents 80 artists and artists organisations who create street art. In addition to this network I am on the steering group of Scotland's local network STREETNET which has a further 85 members with limited overlap between the two networks.

I believe it is absolutely vital that artists and street arts companies are involved in the development of the sector and so I have been pushing for this in two ways: by highlighting the need for artists to become more aware of the issues facing us and to become pro-actively engaged in tackling them and by pointing out wherever possible that artists need to be properly consulted. And this is why, when I first heard about the conference, I thought I would be pro-active and canvas the views of USAN and STREETNET members since creation centres are potentially an amazing resource for us.

To facilitate this, I wrote a brief questionnaire so that I could more easily collate artists' views of and need for creation centres. The response has been simply enormous. Not only did I get a bundle of completed questionnaires, there has been an on-going on-line debate on the nitty gritty of the impact of creation centres ever since. And with such a response, I am only able here to précis that debate and pull out key points!

Those involved in the debates include most of the companies creating medium-large scale work in the UK today: Whalley Range Allstars, Walk the Plank, Artizani, World Famous, Emergency Exit Arts, Neighbourhood Watch, Boilerhouse, Bash Street, Mischief La Bas, Faceless, IOU and a host of smaller companies besides, from the younger groups like Los Kaos to the old hands like Bill Brookman and Big Rory. This is a very healthy representation of professional street artists and thus, I feel, gives a realistic perspective of current thinking in our sector.

The questionnaire asked whether or not companies would use a creation centre and what would block/facilitate usage, what facilities and characteristics a creation centre should have and what problems companies have encountered in creating work (other than the perennial one of finding funding).

I am not going to exhaustively list what people are looking for in an ideal creation centre – for me, this is kind of a side issue at present although the lists of "wants" make interesting reading in themselves. The debates that have raged suggest that there are more fundamental matters to consider than whether or not there should be accommodation purpose-built in to the fabric of a creation centre, although this has been well debated too!

I must say at this point that the discussions did not focus on any specific proposal, and we are aware of a few, but on the concept of creation centres in general.

Initial concerns were raised as to the potential for a creation centre to divert existing resources away from companies, a not uncommon concern whenever a capital build project is proposed. Several people pointed out that a creation centre was more likely to bring in new money and in fact

²⁷ Written by Chloë Dear, USAN steering group member and STREETNET steering group member

may lead to an increase in funding directly available to create work. One person stated that all strategic investment into street arts is to be welcomed, not least because this sector receives small amounts of money in comparison to other performing arts forms.

At the heart of this concern is the fear that a creation centre could become a white elephant – a large building that sat there under-utilised for its original purpose – and that there were perhaps other solutions to meet the needs of the sector. This is something I will return to later.

Beyond these concerns, there was support for the concept of creation centres in general, although some people gave their support with a string of provisos attached, the most common being the need for sufficient production money to enable companies to produce work in a creation centre rather than at their home base. On current resources, almost all companies simply could not afford to use a creation centre, even those in receipt of grants for making work.

Although companies listed a string of problems they had encountered when trying to find suitable places in which to create work, almost all the more established companies had found their own solutions to fit their needs, even when creating large-scale work. Many of these solutions were permanent, that is, involving the purchase or long-term rental of appropriate spaces, the development of partnerships which gave access to specialist resources/individual. However, there are definitely some companies who are forced to divert a lot of energy into finding ways of adequately rehearsing and creating more ambitious work, eg travelling across the country to work in a building sufficiently high enough for aerial rigging.

When asked if they would use a creation centre, many (mainly the larger/older companies) said they would not except for perhaps unique, one-off productions requiring specialist expertise and resources or something much much larger than normal – BIG AMBITIOUS WORK.

The qualified reluctance was due to their own set-ups meeting their needs or because their current budgets could not extend to shifting operations away from their home base, particularly meeting the added costs of accommodation and living, travel, paying higher rates to freelancers for the inconvenience of working away from home etc. Other barriers given to working in a creation centre included: difficulties with being away from their office/storage, being problematic for those with families, having to work on paying gigs during the rehearsal period. Many of these barriers could be overcome by adequate financial resourcing.

In contrast, some companies spoke of the positive experience of working in a concentrated manner away from the day-to-day distractions of office and home: that living and working closely together intensively can be very enriching and rewarding not only for the work but the relationships of those engaged in the process.

Beyond the basic question of whether or not a company would chose to sample the benefits of working in a creation centre, various respondents spoke of the need for creation centres to sit within a wider strategic framework. For example, it was pointless to create large-scale work, this seeming to be the main reason why a company would go to a creation centre, without there being a viable market for it or without the means to sustain a company whilst it was engaged in such an undertaking.

Which kind of leads me to another point raised by respondents to the questionnaire: who controls which companies gain access to such a resource? What role do artists have in deciding what gets created in such a space?

Whether the fear is justified or not, some companies expressed disquiet with the idea of promoters controlling both the means of creation and the ultimate destination of large-scale work. Perhaps a link between creation centres and programming in festivals is necessary but this link is more likely to be viewed positively if this is set into a wider strategy for street arts that artists have been proactively involved in developing. Many companies feel they have not been engaged in strategic planning, at least not on a national level so are somewhat wary of, for example, creation centres.

Means such as USAN go a long way to ensure that far more artists get a chance to consider and contribute to this planning. At the very least, involvement reduces the possibility of misunderstanding motives behind creation centres.

Finally, it was obvious that companies and projects had differing needs that no one creation centre could fulfil. How could there be a "one size fits all" solution when the output of companies is so diverse?

Some people came forward with a range of other possible, flexible solutions to the sector's real need for more resources for new work. Why not, for example, put money into spaces run by a specific company that could meet their needs but be sufficiently resourced to support the creation of work by other companies? Some companies are already doing this themselves or seriously contemplating this, for example by buying farms that were no longer viable and making them available for use by others. Several companies are working closely with local authorities to provide community workshop facilities that double up as their own rehearsal/making space when required. There was the wonderful suggestion of using large ships (eg tankers, ex naval vessels) as creation spaces which gave rise to visions of a flotilla of motley craft floating around the fringes of the British Isles – modern-day ships of fools perhaps.

None of what I have said already should be new to those of you who have put considerable time and effort already in to ascertaining the feasibility of a creation centre. My last comment re-iterates something I stated earlier, that artists need to be fully consulted in any development that will impact on the overall health of the sector. In re-reading some of the emails posted to USAN, I am really struck by the quality of debate and it would be a shame for this debate not to filter outwards to others as equally committed to the growth, strength and sustainability of street arts as artists: promoters, festival directors, local authorities, funding bodies... Without doubt though, for creation centres to be viable and successful, they need the support of those who would be best placed to use them to maximum effect: artists and companies already committed to and experienced in creating street arts.

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