

**LEARNING LAB: CATALYSTS FOR CHANGE
1 DECEMBER 2022 AT THE HORNIMAN PAVILION
A LEARNING LAB BY COUNTERPOINTS ARTS
NOTES BY DANA OLĂRESCU**

10:45 - 11:45 am: INTERNAL LANDSCAPES PANEL

A walk-through and critical reflection on Dima Karout work during the London Borough of Culture in Lewisham. Conversation with Arts Curator and Creative Director, Dima Karout; Paul Aladenika, Head of Policy and Strategy, Lewisham Council; and written contribution by Fergus Downie, Specialist Housing Support and Refugee Resettlement Manager, Lewisham Council.

Moderator: Áine O'Brien, Curator of Learning and Research and Co-Founder, Counterpoints Arts

Dima explains that process is a crucial part
Art as a way of thinking / a platform to initiate conversations and reflections / what do we learn from art / sitting with the idea of what things mean what do we mean when we think of sanctuary

VISION

What is this **place** we're working in? Which sits at the opposite way of place-making; a top down approach and quite patronising to the places that already exist

A project is a moment in time & she is interested in interrogating the place inhabited rather than the diversity of differences of people participating

She reaches out to libraries as places where people gather / institutions that are slowly eroded by the austerity cuts

Her process is durational

Creative conversations

- Talking about what place means in 3 hour long sessions
- Using sketching and screen printing, and carving to tackle place
- Wondering how this place stays with the participants
- Everyone offers a print in exchange/ an offering back to the project

Creative writing workshops

- Circular process in which post workshops Dima writes what she remembered, then she shares that with participants and what is heard & participants' stories get combined
- There's words and ideas coalescing
- Participants meet each other - Which is similar in Teatro Vivo's process

Art Book and Exhibition

- These conversations turn into objects that are then exhibited & eventually a book publication that will stay in the borough in all libraries.
- There's an exhibition at the Horniman Museum & there's digital presence to ensure all contributions to the projects are included
- New learning and engagement programme will run for three months.

Credits

Crediting is an important part of the process

She had various 121s and people's names are listed at the back of the book

Written Feedbacks

Positive feedback from residents after the launch of the exhibition which also becomes evidence

There is something about the fear of too many words and having too much text / the assumption that people don't read in museums

DISCUSSION

Paul: Talks about the meaningful interaction with Dima not just through sharing a desk he once sat at, but through thinking that policy is part science, part art.

He also explains that Dima's socially engaged methodology and inclusive vision brought Council members and many individuals and local organisations together to share creative spaces. Her work offers the Council an additional lens through which to view itself.

He then mentions Voices of Lewisham (a project about people's experiences during the pandemic) and they invite smaller organisations such as food banks, and in doing so they learn that there's a rising Lating American community in the borough - these are not the people who fill in the online surveys and new learning emerges about demographics the council doesn't know much about.

"We need to gather where the communities are and pay attention to which services they need. We are not listening as a local authority"

LANGUAGE & THE MEANING OF WORDS & THINGS

Dima asks us what is sanctuary; a term habitually used to equate to refugees

For her it's about the philosophy & the movement, about all of us contributing and participating, and in order to have a healthy society you need everyone in the room - "Let's not put people in silos and separate them"

She then brings up the issue of the English language - what is the purpose of art if they can't speak English?

She advocates for a distribution of resources for everyone that's already in the borough not just for the new arrivals - creating community building programmes that welcome everyone.

She then speaks about simple practical things such as knowledge-sharing: people not knowing that libraries are free.

And attitudes of key workers and service providers: the simple act of smiling, being welcoming and open / using language to be useful to the person's needs and not a standardised one size fits all method

Resisting words such as marginalised

She thanks the people who listened, Paul listened!

Paul: "Policy is what you experience, not what you write"

He mentions geographies of social economies / spatial mapping is different & all of that needs to feed into policy Layers of identity / communities of geographies

Phil also talks about building trust with people from asylum seeking and refugee backgrounds, and providing space for groups to become part of the community Directing them to libraries requires someone to take that task on

Paul also mentions that ownership means co-production
Integrity of data and purpose

Dima went out to seek what was happening and that's part of looking outwards not inwards Spread out in the borough / intimate spaces of conversation / connecting with local library teams.

Not having a place in the council led her to the interactions with people; only later she read the policies and research & wondered how that was applied to the Here & Now. And was mostly interested in how to turn these visions into practicality, a method and an action plan.

DANA OLĂRESCU is a socially engaged artist, working at the intersection of social design, installation, and performance, socially engaged artist Dana Olărescu focuses on challenging minority exclusion and environmental injustice. Through participatory methodologies that democratise access to art and knowledge, she aims to give underserved migrant groups the agency to become active co-producers of culture.