

Artists as an external voice

Part of my methodology was around ignoring
or erasing partially those boundaries
around a professional practice
which seemed illogical to me
and open up that person's whole experience
so that we could, between us, select things
which seemed the most relevant or significant.

When we were recruiting our artist-in-residence
we weren't looking for somebody
to create a beautiful sculpture for the courtyard.
We really wanted somebody to help us
with our organisational change.

She uses her visual arts practice
as a way of connecting and so, in many ways,
she embodied to the staff
all of those qualities of good engagement
that we're trying to embrace as an organisation.

As an artist practitioner, my entry to the project
really involved me shuffling about, making tea
and starting conversations with people.

Over the period of the residency
my method coalesced into a basic process;
meeting the person, having a conversation with them,
an artwork suggesting itself to me,
developing a proposal for that artwork,
me making the artwork,
drafting some kind of presentation
that could be presented to the wider group,
presenting the artwork
and gifting the artwork to the original participant.

We were hoping that the artist-in-residence
would trigger something within the organisation,
that there would be a ripple out effect of that work.

The evaluation that we did
after Emma's residency was overwhelming really.

There were so many rich stories
that emerged from the people
that were directly involved
with Emma's work but also those people
who were at one removed from it.
I really loved Emma's approach
in that she wasn't highlighting what was wrong
she was really shining a light
on the great things that people do
and the great qualities that people bring to their work.

So, when I spoke to people,
I was very aware of them as human beings
who were doing this professional role
for a very complex and deep range of reasons.
For the paintings conservator,
who uses X-ray technology
to access paintings, secret paintings
concealed behind other paintings,
I used heavy metal pigments
to make a painting for her which I then over-painted
with another painting using modern pigments.
I gifted that to her. She was able to take that away, X-ray it
and secretly reveal her own painting
that was done uniquely for her.

The X-ray painting registered the idea
that there are things that are unknown
and that that itself holds the power.

I think the key message that Emma brought with her approach
was for us to view our colleagues
beyond their job descriptions.

A job description doesn't describe what somebody
actually does, not really.

Organisations are reliant on somebody
colouring that job description in,
bringing much more to it.

You can't award a pay scale to that.

You can't align it to a competency. It's freely given.
I hope an outcome of my residency is
that the directors are more cognisant of that.
Not only are top-down change initiatives
poorly equipped to register existing good practice,
they're almost incapable of registering
the secret or the unsaid
which still significantly informs
what somebody brings to their working life.
So it became important to me
that if we were celebrating
people's creativity, people's contribution,
it was very important that the people
who needed to see that did see it.
So the director or the deputy director
were present at every single meeting which was fantastic.
I think using an artist-in-residence
for cultural change was an innovative take
instead of, say, just getting
another management consultant in.
Emma's approach was really non-confrontational.
Change at work can be really scary.
Staff are under lots of pressure anyway.
I think they did reconnect
with the organisation in a different way.
I think several of them were reminded of the creativity
that infuses the work that made them
want to join Glasgow Museums in the first place.
Glasgow Museums is richer for those people,
richer for the qualities that they bring
and I think Emma's practice
just completely laid that bare.