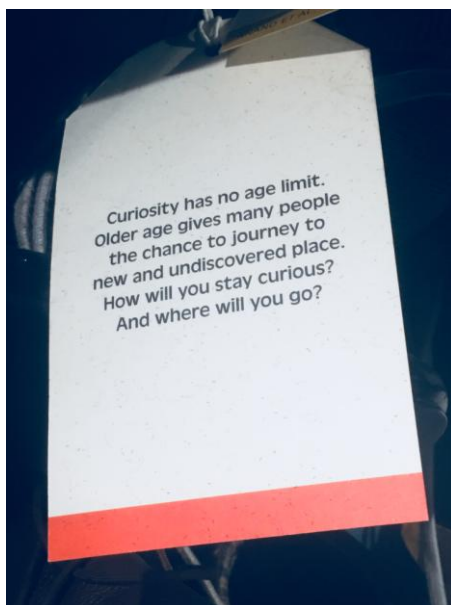


Age of Creativity Festival Blog- Week One

Farrell Curran Festival Manager



'Unclaimed' exhibition at the Barbican, by The Liminal Space

The Age of Creativity Festival week one...where do I start? Perhaps back in 2017 is a good place, when I decided to start this national festival celebrating creative ageing in England...with no funding...or clue how I was going to make it happen. Now fast forward through three incredible AoC Festivals and we have a programme of more than 350 events, spanning the entire country and so many strands of work that it is almost impossible to cover- almost. I won't manage everything, but in my weekly reflections of the festival, I will do my best to give a whistle stop tour...

<https://www.voluntaryarts.org/age-of-creativity>

This year saw our first ever commission and the beginning of our wonderful partnership with the 64 millions artist team- and what a pleasure it has been. Working with Chris Rolls and meeting so many inspirational older people, as well as staff at local Age UKs has been one of the highlights of my year. In Rotherham, I sat in the 'naughty corner' with a group of women who broke all of the rules and put tears in my eyes- with joy and sorrow combined. It was an honour to meet people with such tenacity and humour- and the work they produced was top notch. The same can be said for my experience in Banbury, with the Late Spring group who injected such beauty and inspiration into this project. Ideas taken directly from these individuals, along with others in Kent are reflected in the '31 Creative Challenges' for each day of the festival. This FREE resource is designed to support anyone and everyone to get creative, along with a PDF designed for group facilitators to use as inspiration.

<http://dothinkshare.com/creative-challenges-for-age-uk-facilitators/>

For 2019 we chose an 'intergenerational' theme because we know 'older people' want to connect with people of all ages. There is a tonne of research to back this up, but the bottom line is that we know 'older people' as a group do not exist, but each individual who happens to be 50+ is connected to communities and families of all ages. We don't want to silo 'older people' into a group and forget that in the real world, these lines don't exist when it comes to ageing. Having the 'intergenerational' theme enables us to promote the best examples of supporting people aged 50+ to creatively connect with people of all ages, whilst also recognising that people of all ages want to spend time with their peer group and often gain a lot from taking part in specialist groups that cater for additional support requirements. We also wanted to place a bigger emphasis on 'older people' as artists, leaders, producers and creative thinkers, as well as audiences and participants- because we want to celebrate it all this month.



Age of Creativity Headline Conference at Whitworth Art Gallery Manchester

Our headline conference on the 2nd May was testament to these aspirations. We went 'wacky', and I was really pleased that we took a risk and tried a new approach, focussing on the future of our sector, rather than the work that has already taken place. The event was time out from the day job to explore our own relationship to creativity and age, as well as a chance to meet with other professionals and spend more time talking than listening. As one delegate kindly said "The conference was the most refreshing and productive I have been to. Not only were the provocations life-enhancing and truly provocative, but the format allowed space and time for really useful discussion."

So, to the provocations... I was lucky enough to work intensively with the Centre for Policy on Ageing to develop the programme and content. We all went on a 'journey' I think it's fair to say, and my understanding of 'ageing across the life course' has not only deepened, but I have gained a new sense of purpose and urgency in this work; I was forced to confront my own internalised ageist attitudes and reconsider how and what I champion. Working with Susan Langford MBE of Magic Me was equally invigorating and after hours of exploring the concept of an 'emerging artist', Susan eloquently distilled these ideas into an 8 minute presentation that each and every one of us could understand and consider. The response to this provocation generated a great many practical

solutions and I can't wait to get together and think this through in more detail, enabling more artists of all ages to 'emerge' and keep re-emerging for life. I also worked with 'Get The Picture' at Age UK Oxfordshire, to develop a new Age Friendly film that placed the public at the heart of our discussions, seeing an Age Friendly World through their 'lens' and creative vision.

From a film developed in collaboration with older and younger people across Oxfordshire, to Clive Parkinson's 'Cold Dark Matter'. This short 8 minute provocation was... provocative. In fact, the room was stunned into silence and the first thing someone said was 'can we watch it again?'- my sentiments exactly. As a stand-alone poem, the film got us all to imagine the extremes of the social, economical, political, environmental disasters ahead of us, before presenting the role of the artist as a tonic for these ills. The creative mind was given more power than any of us have begun to explore...and we all want to watch it again. We will be releasing the provocations delivered within our festival, so do please watch, listen and get involved.

<http://www.ageofcreativity.co.uk/festival/provocations>

A couple of new additions to the day were our 'roaming provocateurs'; artists Leslie Thompson and Nakib Narat who spent the day listening to discussions and reflecting a representation of our own conclusions straight back at us. Leslie is a visual artist, supported by Venture Arts, and produced the most phenomenal illustrations of delegates and stand out moments. One delegate said that 'inviting Leslie here was a stroke of genius' and I have to agree. Seeing his portraits and visual interpretations of complex discussions was a breath of fresh air at the end of the day. Nakib, a theatre maker and poet summed it up with his poem:

Such a Lovely Day in Whitworth's Grand Hall.
Each Provocation flies like a fiery cannonball.
Artists, Educators, Professionals raze
Ageing's Shibboleths & Set Ageism ablaze.
Wonderful Visions Spanning Blue Sky.
Even emulating the curious *Turritopsis dohrnii*,
From Wheelchair friendly maze and silent disco;
"Skewing social spheres" to reverberant, tremolo,
Pleas of Ageless, Artistic Opportunity For All!



Nakib Narat presenting his poem alongside Leslie Thompson's illustration at the Age of Creativity conference

After a brief trip home to sleep, I then had the pleasure of making the penultimate day of the 'Unclaimed' Exhibition at the Barbican: 'A surreal lost property office to uncover stories about ageing today, and ask questions about our shared futures.' Now, I read a LOT of stuff on ageing and creativity, but there was a LOT in here that I hadn't seen before. The exhibition was a blend of research, stories and provocations, excellently curated into an interactive space for the public to enjoy. All I kept thinking was...this needs to go on tour...we need more of this in the festival next year...and we do. Commissioned by the Barbican, led by The Liminal Space and put together with a huge number of prestigious organisations, again this needs to be the beginning of our collective conversation and exploration of Creative Ageing.

<https://www.barbican.org.uk/whats-on/2019/event/unclaimed-the-liminal-space>

So, finally to the social media explosion on the Age of Creativity; thank you to everyone who has tagged us, liked us and shared us this week. It is important to us that we make as much of all our work visible this year as possible; we have the eyes and ears of funders and decision makers, so we need to make the most of it. Huge thanks to Creative Minds for our first Instagram Takeover, giving us a flavour of their work and festival event. We would love to see what goes in your world too, so please get in touch to share and connect.

So that was week one... and here's to week two!