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**SO WHAT DO YOU DO?**

**(Exploring the conditions of a sustainable plural creative practice)**

**by**

**Emrys Plant**

**Canterbury Christ Church University**

**Thesis submitted  
for the degree of MA by Research**

**2019**

## Covering Meta-Statement

This submission is presented as work under the Practice Based Research Mode. The submission is made up of five parts, each section is presented in a 'zine' style format, both in print and as digital files. The submission is best viewed on screen as a collection of 'digital zines' (pdf documents) that allow links to sound and film portfolio work. This zine format has been constructed to best reflect the collected nature of the independent disciplines within the plural practice portfolio, as well as the DIY voice that permeates the presented content. The A5 pamphlet style layout is also synonymous as a presentation device within the areas in which I work, as look-book, poetry publication and arts festival guide.

The introduction aims to contextualise the practice, exploring the wider cultural setting and theoretical grounding that underpins the practice-based line of enquiry, here I introduce the research questions and the practice background as well as outline the research approaches and key terms used. The introductory section is intended to act as a sturdy foundation of research on which the practice based portfolio can build.

The portfolio content is arranged into three parts, each section presents substantial creative practice carried out in this masters by research period. The creative work done as research by practice is expected to be considered alongside the accompanying critical reflections within each section. These sections are both documentation, analysis and contextualisation of my creative practice, on a local, national and international level working with creative institutions and communities. The three portfolio sections allow a deep consideration of practice and the space for personal reflections offering a distinct working position from which to draw meaningful insight:

- My work at design studio CROWTHER/PLANT designing graphics and garments for a sustainable clothing brand. The study period focuses on the creative development of a full collection of garments, as well as the wider work involved as part of a small business start-up. During this project, I was supported by the British Fashion Council to represent the best of British design at Paris men's fashion week and London men's fashion week. The Critical reflections focus on the work-life balance and work stresses that strain that balance.
- As a visual artist, I often lead and facilitate socially engaged arts education projects for arts organisations. 'Positive Protest' is a project I delivered as part of the Folkestone Triennial 2017 for the Triennial organisers The Creative Foundation. Folkestone Triennial is an international arts festival held every three years in the Kent Coastal town, I worked with the Foundation's education team to deliver the creative and political principles inspired by Artist Bob and Roberta Smith's Triennial Commission. I will look at the influence of clients on practice, pay and creative fulfilment.
- I am a spoken word poet and performer, during this research period I wrote an hour long solo show to be performed at 2017 edition of Wise Words literary festival Canterbury. The intimate festival hosted performances from writers such as Roger McGough, Shane Koyczan, Hollie McNish and Lemn Sissay. In contrast to this solo material I was also commissioned by the Wallace Foundation in London to write and perform a poem inspired by their collection. The Wallace is home to an important national collection of historical works of art, interiors and eighteenth century furniture. I reflect on the conditions experienced during both projects.

The practice content is supported by critical reflections, observations that link the practice to key ideas presented in the introduction.

Each portfolio section also contains interviews with creative practitioners. The semi structured interviews are open conversations, introducing practitioners that offer insight into the diversity of the creative industries as; artists, musicians, lecturers, writers, performers and designers. The interviews offer vital positions to act as both support and counterpoint to the personal practice.

1/

# So what do you do?

Exploring the conditions of a sustainable plural creative practice

Portfolio and critical analysis by Emrys Plant

MA by research



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1. Charlotte Player, 2016, *Crowther/  
Plant look-book image.*



## **Acknowledgments**

Special thanks to Dr Alan Meades for his support and patience during this study period. Thanks to all interviewees: Tom Adams, Claire Orme, Laura McCafferty, Heidi Plant, Dan Chilcott and Tania McCormack, for giving their invaluable time and insight.

Canterbury Christ Church University Department of Media, Art and Design for their financial support.

I, Emrys William Plant, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.





2. Emrys Plant, 2017, Margate  
*Festival intervention*

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## Introduction

When asked ‘What do you do?’ the expected answer is often defined by our work and career. The root of what we do for a living can be explored in first asking *why* we do for a living.

It is well understood that we need to work to live (to provide money for subsistence) but this has its detractions within a developed society that has an all-providing welfare state. In the UK’s, developed capitalist economy there has grown a need to work to consume (working to acquire spending power beyond basic means). Interestingly now this consumerist model is changing, in a move towards a post-consumer society there is a growth in the desire to work for expressive and ethical reasons: ‘a substantial minority of people work for reasons other than money and that a majority of people say they would continue to work even if there was no financial need to do so’ (Blyton et al, 2013, p.54). I am part of this group who identifies with reasons for having a need to work beyond the need for money. I have been working in the creative industries for over fifteen years and find it deeply rewarding in terms of creative fulfilment and the opportunity to follow philosophical and ethical practices. The creative industries are economically a very important part of the UK economy, contributing £101.5bn in 2017 and making up 5.5% of the total economy. Since 2010 the sector has grown a massive 53.1% making it the fastest growing sector in the UK economy (Creative industries federation, 2017).

Working within the creative industries may have in the past been seen as an esoteric career choice; now the sector is transformed into solid creative jobs across digital, culture, media and artistic creativity and support. The creative sector is currently experiencing an employment surge, expanding much faster than other areas of the economy. Data from 2017 reveals that in total 1 in 11 jobs in the UK are in the wider creative economy (Creative industries council, 2017). It is encouraging as a creative practitioner that there is increasing recognition of the value of creative work and its important contribution to the wider economy.

Self-employed or freelance status within the creative sector has long been a normal mode of employment that shows no sign of slowing. Self-employment as a whole has been the fastest rising mode of employment across the spectrum since the 2008 financial crash, responsible for

40% of new employment in the UK (Kelly, 2017). As a self-employed person working in the creative sector, it is comforting to know that my position is validated in some way by the increasing numbers of people choosing to be self-employed. The benefits of self-employment include being flexible with time, having creative freedom and working on a diversity of projects. These personal benefits go some way to offset the knowledge that statistically I will earn less being self-employed, estimated at only 60% of an employed person's earnings (Kelly, 2017). Laura Gardner from the Resolution Foundation charity, highlighted their recent survey results revealing that "despite all the challenges, most are happy being self-employed. It was a positive choice and not a last resort and weighing everything up today, given the choice, most would stay self-employed rather than go back to being an employee....It's not all about money, There is a trade-off between earnings and satisfaction and flexibility" (Gardner cited in Robinson, 2015).

Of the creative workers in the sector, 35% are self-employed, compared with 15% across the workforce as whole.

Freelancers make up a significant portion of self-employed workers in the creative industries (Creative industries federation, 2017).

The streamlining of organisations and development of new technologies, as well as employment legislation that allows distance and flexitime working, have all led more people to manage their own work time across the employment landscape. Kanter (cited in McGovern et al, 1998, p.460) notes: 'reliance on organisations to give shape to career is being replaced by reliance on self', meaning that whether as an employee or self-employed, the individual worker is now more empowered to make career decisions.

It is important to have explored the employment landscape in which I work, identifying the socio-economic background in which the practice takes place will help contextualise the research further. This macro landscape affected by government policy, legal requirements, economic factors, technological and social change, is a foundation for a working practice that is of course also affected by more personal working conditions. Each strand of practice is subject to a micro environment of influencing conditions and it is these conditions I am keen to identify through a portfolio of practice and explore the commonalities between each area of work. These conditions of practice will shape the way

work is conceived, developed and delivered, they inform decisions and ultimately shape a sustainable practice.

A changing employment landscape is perhaps influenced by a social change in the way families approach employment in a post-industrial economy. The Fordist, nuclear family, with a male breadwinner as the norm is changing, leading to what could be argued as an end to masculinity. MacInnes (1998) helps define masculinity: ‘what we now think of as masculinity was originally used to legitimate patriarchy, by demonstrating how men were more capable of exercising public power than women’. MacInnes argues that ‘masculinity does not exist as the property, character trait or aspect of identity of individuals’ and ‘exists only as various ideologies and fantasies about what men *should* be like’ (MacInnes, 1998, p.2). The changing of traditional gender roles within a family has also been described as a crisis in patriarchy, that ‘manifests itself in the increasing diversity of partnership arrangements among people to share life and raise children’ (Castells, 1997, p.221).

Family life is of primary concern over and above work life for the majority of working people in the UK. As a father my responsibilities to my family are not only functional to provide for their needs but also expressive and caring. My partner and I attempt to revise the traditional gender roles within our family in regards to childcare against a social backdrop where ‘normative constructs still allocate the major responsibility of care to women’ (Crompton 2008, p.85)

Heidi and I both work in the creative industries and have a desire to approach life with a freedom and inquiry that offers rich experiences for ourselves and our children, providing a balanced, safe and secure home environment.

The obligation for working parents is a precise one: the feeling that one ought to work as if one did not have children, while raising one’s children as if one did not have a job (Stranks, 2016).

The influence of family and parenthood on a creative practice is pertinent in the reflections within this study, as it provides a personal base from which to make sense of a broad practice. Looking at practice holistically gives me a chance to recognise where the pushes and pulls may be in achieving a work-life balance:

Work-life *balance* is, it might be argued, a somewhat misleading phrase, in that the term *balance* suggests that some sort of harmony has been achieved between the competing demands of employment and family life (Crompton, 2008, p.78).

Crompton suggests that the unsettled nature of work-life conditions can be more accurately labelled as work-life conflicts.

Family and personal relationships are integral components of life and practice, inseparable, one cannot exist in isolation without the other. It therefore makes sense to engage a holistic view of practice and life that surrounds it. Familial concerns exert the strongest influences on my work, both as a positive creative influence and as a distractive time share. The emotional connection to creative work and to family are so close that their energies feel shared, there is a common need for full presence and mindful engagement in both. In attempting to share the same space a potential discord appears. ‘Work does not take place in isolation, but forms one important component of most adults’ lived reality. Potentially, these different components will come into conflict if demands from one sphere impact on others’ (Blyton et al, 2013, p.342). Blyton identifies that any imbalance between work and non-work is likely to either come from the pressures of work limiting family responsibilities *or* family pressures limiting work obligations.

The objective of this thesis is to explore and identify the conditions that shape a plural creative practice. In a holistic way identifying the conditions that affect work-life balance and importantly the sustainability of a practice that has multiple creative strands. As well as identifying the influencing working conditions of a plural practice the aim is to also explore the common creative ground that may exist between the disciplines within the practice.

All creative projects go through much the same emotional landmarks or points of mild psychological interest: the specifics of the journey will be distinct to the project, the landmarks are generally the same (Beadle, 2017, p.92).

As a guiding influence, the role of family on creative practice is paramount to the shape a practice can take. This research aims to explore the relationship between family life and plural creative practice and reflect upon the role of fatherhood within this practice.

## Research Question

1. What are the common conditions influencing the sustainability of a plural practice in the contemporary creative sector?

## Sub-questions

1. What affect do the personal demands of parenthood have on the sustainability of a plural practice in the contemporary creative sector?
2. How do the individual disciplines within a plural creative practice connect to form a coherent sustainable plural practice in the contemporary creative sector?

## Plural creative practice

Plural creative practice, in the context of this study, is a professional working practice that combines different creative endeavours involving distinctly different physical processes. There is the potential for the different parts of the practice to take place at the same time and to share concepts and combined outputs. The vocational label: ‘plural creative practitioner’ is a term that has evolved with the need to identify myself within the creative industry. The plurality of process within the practice is what makes it different when compared to a singular practice. In a singular creative practice, a practitioner may be primarily focussed on a singular creative physical process.

It is important to note that plural practice itself can be structured in a variety of ways; not always as an interwoven practice of shared ideas and processes that happen in the same place at the same time. For example a plural ‘mosaic practice’ may describe blocks of separate projects or processes carried out completely independently both in time and concept. A plural ‘parallel practice’ could describe multiple strands of practice being carried out perhaps independently in time but sharing ideas that inform the work in the same conceptual direction.

Culture today is becoming a mass affair, the artist must step down from his pedestal and be prepared to make a sign for a butchers shop (if he knows how to do it). The artist must cast off

the last rags of romanticism and become active as a man among men, well up in present day techniques, materials and working methods. Without losing his innate aesthetic sense he must be able to respond with humility and competence to the demands his neighbours may make of him (Munari, 2008, p.25).

One of the key aspects of this research is the reflection on a personal creative practice, a subjective view that potentially can lead to bias in the findings. This however is also a uniquely strong position offering valuable insight into a professional practice, a focussed window through which to contextualise practice in the wider creative industries.

This research does not explore interdisciplinary practice which could introduce disciplines from outside the creative industries such as philosophy, social science, technology, politics – all brought together with a myriad of influences. An interdisciplinary practitioner may be known as a ‘polymath’ - an individual whose knowledge extends across plural fields, however, in the context of this research ‘plural creative practitioner’ feels more appropriate. A polymath works in plural fields accumulating considerable knowledge in multiple fields of interest. A polymath is thought of as a plural knowledge holder; a general know it all who is well balanced and capable at judging in the round, the expert seems one-sided in comparison. Stephen Fry attributes his plurality to ‘being greedily curious and saying yes to things’ (Fry in Monkman and Seagull, 2017). Saying yes to things begins a dialogue, which requires engagement with others. This dialogue and willingness to say yes to things, often forms unique pathways in my practice. There are however negative feelings attached to being a ‘jack of all trades, master of none’. Thomas Young (the last man to know everything), was not an artist, he was however an eminent physician, physicist and Egyptologist but even in the early 1800’s his diversity frustrated his contemporaries; could he be proficient in any one area if he spread himself so thin? (Robinson, 2006).

## **Personal practice**

My career has evolved on a journey through the creative sector into a plural creative practice; graphic design, fashion design, arts education, contemporary art, socially engaged public art and poetry performance. I have worked as a sessional university lecturer during this study period,



teaching in visual art and graphic design. Lecturing provides a vital income and complements my physical practice.

Each strand of my practice is identifiable as a singular concern, in output and in process. Plural creative practice weaves these multi-creative strands together with a personal ideology, a creative practice is as much about the person as it is the product of their energies. Peter Korn (2013) articulates a moment of clarity when he realised what he had been trying to make in product (as a furniture designer) were the qualities he most aspired to as a person:

My own values become clear when I eventually realised that the words I used to describe my aesthetic goals as a furniture maker – integrity, simplicity, and grace – also described the person I sought to grow into through the practice of craftsmanship (Korn, 2013, p.102).

Artist and cultural critic Austin Kleon addresses the tension in trying to identify and label arts practice by stressing that coherence or unity is both a trap and a way out. Kleon advises: ‘Don’t worry about unity from piece to piece - what unifies all of your work is the fact that you made it’ (Kleon, 2012, p.70). Identifying as a plural practitioner is at times unclear for people looking in from the outside, it can be confusing and lead to the feeling that such a diverse practice is in some way invalid. The writer Robert Macfarlane gives a confidence boosting thought on the validity of doing; in conversation with a seasoned sea captain he revealed that in his line of work ‘proof of competence is derived only from absence of catastrophe’ (Macfarlane, 2013, p.133). Macfarlane provides a useful metaphor for creative professionals who navigate the diversity of the creative industries, successfully finding a place for themselves to work.

What I do know is that I am at the centre of a plural practice that employs diverse processes to realise outcomes of different forms that potentially deal with common conceptual concerns. I ask visual questions that are familiarly awkward, socially and environmentally conscious yet introspective. How these ideas are processed and what they look like at the end, indeed if there is an end, also has shared materiality and place. There is undoubtedly a continuation of ideas, carried forward by the synergy of practice.

I tend to collaborate with others, I have a need to share the process

and make creative connection with other makers, audiences, consumers and society. A collaborative approach can be a key element of plural practice with skills and knowledge being shared to enable the plurality to deepen, ‘collaboration may involve inter-disciplinary, multi-disciplinary, inter-institutional or international participation, each of which adds complexity to the process’ (Poggenpohl, 2004, p.138). Poggenpohl also notes that insular practitioners in contrast work less collaboratively: ‘Individuals are increasingly aware of the limitations to their knowledge and skill in a complex technological and increasingly interactive world’ (Poggenpohl, 2004, p.157).

Reflecting on my plural practice and its influences provides a clearing in which to explore what I do and how I do it through a critical lens; identifying influencing conditions, what they mean and exploring their impact. Key to this understanding is exploring other practitioners, questioning their methods and working systems and finding a sustainable path amongst the rich narrative of a creative life.

I have identified myself at a juncture, seeking a sustainable future for my practice that allows for creative fluency and progression as a professional practitioner. Work demands need to be balanced with the responsibility of caring for my family in order for both to be sustainable. A plural practice has many inputs that can develop exciting non-linear pathways, however the *noise* created by so much activity can be disruptive and blinding from the very thing we are looking for: ‘The truth knocks on the door and you say “Go away, I’m looking for the truth,” and so it goes away. Puzzling’ (Prisig, 1974, p.7). Prisig identifies an unsustainable pace of modern life that is particularly pertinent now as we engage with new medias, become exposed to global cultures and face a changing politics at all levels. The pressures of both work and family are a challenging mix that has the potential for chaos just as much as contentment.

What does a well-designed and balanced life look like? Imagine a day cut into perfectly equal pieces of pie – one slice for career, one slice for health, one slice for family and friends, one slice for play and fun (Burnett and Evans, 2018, p.187).

The following sections of research in this critical reflection will contain three chapters each consisting of the presentation of substantial practice carried out in this MA research period. The creative work

carried out as research by practice is expected to be considered in order that it may form the basis for critical analysis into sustainable plural practice. In turn this will help contextualise the practical work and interrogate how the practice moves forward in relation to the research questions. Ultimately it is part of the process by which the critical reflections have been produced; these sections are documentation, analysis and contextualisation of my practice. The portfolio work allows a deep consideration of plural practice and the space to compose personal reflections. This offers a distinct working position of direct experience in a plural creative practice, drawing from new work produced over a focussed period of study time, helping contextualise the practice and explore the research questions in line with the methodologies set out in the following pages. The practice content is supported by interviews with creative practitioners. The semi structured interviews are open conversations, introducing practices that offer insight into working across the diversity of the creative industries as; artists, musicians, lecturers, writers, performers and designers. Interviewees were chosen for their work within different fields, the plurality or the singularity of their practice and their different approaches to work planning. Interviewees are all in early or mid-career and offer a relevant comparison between the case study practice.



3. Emrys Plant, 2016, *Family photo.*



4. Jason Evans, 2016, *Resort Studio Members.*

## Methodologies

In order to investigate the common conditions that influence plural creative practice, there are a series of smaller questions that must be asked to help shape the context in which this research takes place. Through selected approaches the questions will be explored, gathering observations and data to build a rounded view of the setting. This research question is complex however and these methodologies are by no means faultless but do offer the best ways in which I could understand my work critically. There are weaknesses in these lines of enquiry that I have tried to mitigate but are an inevitable part of the chosen approach.

## Practice based research

The breadth of practice within the wider creative industries includes areas as diverse as film, music, literature, visual arts and graphic design to games design, advertising and radio; due to this variety there is flexibility in the approach. Creative practice can be an incredibly personal and subjective undertaking for each individual practitioner, each having their own reasons for doing what they do and how they go about it.

I chose this approach in order to best understand the nuances of a personal creative practice, this research will turn the focus on my own practice. I have compiled a multi-discipline portfolio of works undertaken in this study period to form the body of research and the subject of critical reflection. The processes and product of this creative work will contribute to the outcomes of the research process and contributes to answering the research question, 'creative work in itself is a form of research and generates detectable research outputs .... creative practice - the training and specialised knowledge that creative practitioners have and the processes they engage in when they are making art - can lead to specialised research insights which can then be generalised and written up as research' (Smith and Dean, 2009, p.5). The processes and product of my plural creative practice has been divided into three areas of work:

1. My work at design studio CROWTHER/PLANT designing graphics and garments for a sustainable clothing brand. The study period will focus on the creative development of a full collection as well as the wider work involved as part of a small business start-up.  
During this project, I was supported by the British Fashion Council to represent the best of British design at Paris men's fashion week and London men's fashion week. The critical reflections focus on the work-life balance and work stresses that strain that balance.
2. As a visual artist, I often lead and facilitate socially engaged arts education projects for arts organisations. '*Positive Protest*' is a project I delivered as part of the Folkestone Triennial 2017 for the Triennial organisers The Creative Foundation. Folkestone Triennial is an international arts festival held every three years in the Kent Coastal town, I worked with the Foundation's education team to deliver the creative and political principles inspired by Artist Bob and Roberts Smith's Triennial Commission. I will look at the influence of clients on practice, pay and creative fulfilment.
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The work inevitably generates knowledge and progressive outputs that are complementary with other research styles and methods. There of course is an inbuilt subjectivity to practice based content and critical reflections that are open to bias.

## **Action research**

Action research is concerned with the collaboration an action researcher and a client have in the diagnosis of the problem and in the development of a solution; this differs from practice-based research that is based on an original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice, not necessarily in collaboration.

I have used action research as an investigation of my own practice in order to make observations, that in reflection I have been able use to positively influence my decision making in continued practice. During this practice period, I have been working with, and for, demanding third party organisations whose client demands and updates helped shape my observations on time planning particularly, and helped towards answering the research questions. Direct observations on my practice were taken continually, forming timelines, action plans and shaping the creative output. Again, the subjective nature as a sole practitioner makes for a singular view point, however the dynamic collaborative action approach also gives the opportunity for direct feedback of testing and re-testing of practice approaches.

## **Semi-structured interviews**

I conducted face to face interviews with practitioners working in diverse creative fields. The semi-structured questioning led to open dialogue with the interviewees and explored a holistic view of their practice. The conversations revealed the wider conditions that influence their individual practices. I was aware of the work of produced by the interviewees prior to our meeting, some participants I had personally known for some time. Heidi Plant and I have been married for 12 years, a large part of understanding my work is its impact upon family (or rather family and practice); Heidi is both a practitioner and my spouse and is impeccably qualified to offer insight into this. I recognise that there is a potential issue of objectivity /bias in using interview material from my wife as her views may be influenced by wanting to do what is best for me, however I believe this questioning is in fact opening my work/life balance into major critique and insight, it's brave; her insight on my practice and the impact of that practice on our relationship and

family is invaluable. Heidi's interview serves as a counterpoint to other interviewees whose practices are perhaps less affected by family and certainly not affected by my own practice. I have followed the work of Laura McCafferty since we met in Nottingham in 2001 and value her experience of career change and development alongside her work in education. Having recently seen Tom Adams in his show 'Elephant and Castle' I was keen to discuss how he approaches writing and performing his own shows and his approach to planning. My interview with Claire Orme was the first time we had formally met. Having visited her contemporary arts space 'Flat 38 Gallery', I was keen to discuss how Claire approached her work as both artist and curator. The interviewees were primarily selected for the diversity of processes they employ and how that would reflect the plurality in my own practice.

## **Auto-ethnography**

I have engaged in an auto-ethnographic approach to place study of my plural practice as a broad investigation into the culture and setting in which my practice takes place. The immediate relationships with my spouse and family and their needs is vital, as too is my relationship with the community in which I live and work. Reflecting upon my personal position as creator and communicator within these settings has brought these relationships in to my research. I have worked within the creative community in the South East of England since moving to Kent in 2006. In 2013 I co-founded Resort studios in Margate, a multi discipline studio space for over forty creative practitioners, as co-director of the studios, I built upon the professional network of creative practitioners and organisations, particularly in areas of socially engaged practice. I rely on the creative community for work and stimulation, I engage with public communities as collaborators, as audience, and as customer. My impact on these communities has provided key observations within the practice reflections. There is a narrative approach to the presentation of my practice, autobiographical in a sense, a reflection perhaps of the narratives constructed in the work itself. My wider research has also taken in narrative inquiry from the autobiographical references from the work of practitioners such as Peter Korn and theorists such as Richard Sennett.



## **Key Terms**

### **Plural creative practice**

In the context of this study creative practice is used as a term covering the day to day work of a practitioner whose endeavours take place within the creative industries. What further defines a practitioner within their fields may well depend on their processes and outputs, Munari (2008) defines a designer as ‘a planner with an aesthetic sense’ The plurality of practice applies to a practitioner undertaking more than one discipline of creative work. Muratovski (2016) summarises cross disciplinary design as ‘multidisciplinary ways of working that call for a collaboration between two or more different disciplines when working together on the same project’.

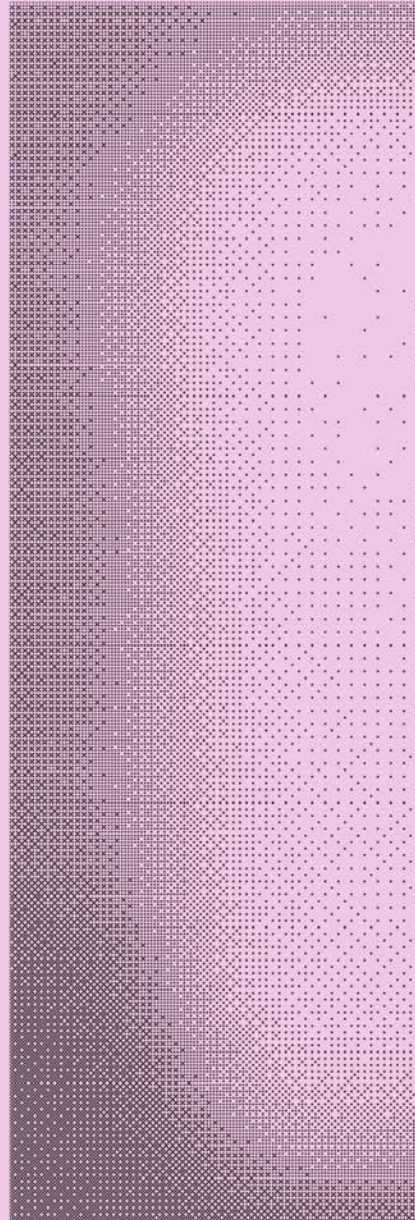
### **Spoken word**

The Poetry Foundation defines the spoken word as: ‘A broad designation for poetry intended for performance. Though some spoken word poetry may also be published on the page, the genre has its roots in oral traditions and performance’.

### **Community Interest Company (CIC)**

Resort studios where my studio is based is a CIC, I have been a co-director of the studios since its foundation. Its status as a CIC is important as it represents the social integration within the community of the studios. The government define a CIC as: A Community Interest Company (CIC) is a limited company, with special additional features, created for the use of people who want to conduct a business or other activity for community benefit, and not purely for private advantage.





## 2/ Design practice



## Design practice: CROWTHER/PLANT

*Showtime – work time – build something good – plan – deliver – late nights/all night/early mornings – work away – maintain – never stop – escape – juggle – self-motivated – busy – travel – design*

### Introduction

I have been working creatively in the fashion industry for fifteen years, designing garments, print graphics, marketing material and branding. I have launched two streetwear labels and managed their growth from start-ups to commercially profitable brands. I have also consulted for similar brands in the streetwear market.

I co-founded new brand CROWTHER/PLANT in 2014 with fellow designer Catherine Crowther. The company was formed after a successful bid for regional funding from Thanet District council as part of a *Creative Coast* regeneration project. I am the creative director and managing director of the brand.

CROWTHER/PLANT is a relaxed menswear collection, built on sustainable principles, it is influenced heavily by its location at Resort studios in the resurgent coastal town of Margate England. The creative inspiration for our active silhouette comes from the poetry of where we live and work by the sea, from its chalk reefs and calm waters to its burning sunset skies, the product reflects a natural spirited feel.

The design process for the brand has been informed by the creative approach in other areas of my practice, I design with a poetic narrative which translates into a natural, visual balance of material, form and colour. I have been able to build a passionately sustainable brand, committed to developing a direction that marries broad creative influence with ecological and socially sustainable principles. Produced exclusively in England with organic cotton, using natural indigo in our dye process that gives an incredible depth of colour and unique finish. I believe we are part of a positive change happening in design towards a more sustainable future. Within the clothing industry brands such as Story mfg, Patagonia and Howies and designing with organic and recycled materials with a sustainable approach to manufacturing and committed social awareness.

In support of a sustainable approach, an industry report by the

Global Fashion Agenda organisation found that in their survey of the executives polled, 52% reported that sustainability targets acted as a guiding principle for nearly every strategic decision they made (Global fashion agenda, 2018). Although encouraging signs are emerging of sustainability being on the agenda in the fashion industry, the above report also highlights there is a very long way to go, with over 1/3 of the industry not currently taking any action at on sustainability issues.

## **Selected practice history**

- 2002 Launch Pseudohero brand, a mid-market menswear t-shirt brand
- 2004 The Princes Trust Enterprise of the year (East Midlands)
- 2005 The Paul Smith award for design business
- 2006 Topman design concession with full collection of t-shirts, sweats, shirts and jackets.
- 2008 Pseudohero Ltd sold, having been stocked in over 50 retail outlets around the world.
- '09-'14 Freelance design for brands such as; Elvis Jesus/Religion, Tristate, Annie Greenabelle
- 2014 Develop CROWTHER/PLANT sustainable jersey collection
- 2017 Show CROWTHER/PLANT in London and Paris, deliver to 10 stockists worldwide.

From a sales perspective, I wanted the brand to be sold both directly online and through wholesale accounts with retail stores. This aspect of my practice is more commercially positioned and scalable with projections forecasting that by 2018 wholesale accounts would be generating enough revenue to support at least two salaries. The brand is introduced to retail buyers through industry trade events in the UK and Europe. The UK fashion and Textiles (UKFT) organisation has invited the brand to 'meet the buyer' events, as well as UK Trade and Investment (UKTI) 'trade with Japan' initiatives.

More recently CROWTHER/PLANT was selected by the British Fashion Council (BFC) to showcase at London and Paris Men's Fashion Weeks as part of 'London Showrooms' supported by the BFC. The label has now delivered five premium streetwear seasonal collections. We have opened 10 wholesale accounts with stores in the UK, Japan, Australia, Italy and Spain, this level of growth is roughly in line with start up projections.

## Process

The design process within this small business is a broad collaborative undertaking. Co-founder Catherine Crowther and I both take responsibility to work on not only design but also on the diverse range of tasks that bring the label to market. ‘Many people think that designers are lone geniuses, working in solitude and waiting for a flash of inspiration to show them a solution to their design problem. Nothing could be further from the truth’ (Burnett and Evans, 2018, p.22). With so many tasks to cover across the design process there is a real need for collaboration to bring successful design solutions forward.

Creative industries businesses account for 11.8% of all businesses in the UK. Almost 95% (94.8%) of creative industries businesses are micro businesses (less than 10 employees).

68.6% of creative industries businesses have a turnover of less than £100,000, which is higher than the 55.2% for UK businesses as a whole.

(<https://www.creativeindustriesfederation.com/statistics>)

All aspects of our studio work are underpinned by an ecological and socially sustainable approach; our actions must try to do what is best for people and planet. This means that we only produce using organic cotton and recycled fabric, our organic cotton is grown in India and certified by the Soil Association. We make our own fabric in the UK, our knitting factory is a certified Organic producer and a Fairtrade partner. We only Dye our garments using natural dyes, no harmful chemicals are used during production. The knitting plant and the sewing factory are both based in Leicester, England. Supporting UK manufacturing not only helps keep traditional manufacturing skills and communities alive but also reduces our use of freight of goods, in turn reducing our environmental impact. Both factories are independently audited for quality assurance. ‘UK manufacturing is enjoying a great renaissance, helped by the growth in the cost benefits of re-shoring and the sustainability agenda’ (UKFT, 2017).

We only screen print with water based inks as opposed to plastisol oil based inks. We only use recycled papers for our swing tickets and packaging and we will supply re-usable plastic garment bags on request but prefer stores to opt for paper. This position is informed by fifteen years of working in the garment industry, building knowledge in cotton production, overseas garment manufacture and dying processes. Our research into our sustainability position is based on information from the Fair Trade Foundation, Soil Association, Ethical Fashion Forum, Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS), Oeko-Tex and others.

Even without considering the beneficial impact of investing in sustainability on brand building and risk management, the business case is compelling: improving a fashion brand's environmental and social performance actually boosts profitability (Global fashion agenda, 2018).

## **Study Focus**

This period of practice, over the course of the MA study year, presents my work on the CROWTHER/PLANT Autumn/Winter 2017 collection, the development for which started in September 2016. The timeline presented here identifies the headline actions as the collection develops, this list of actions repeats itself throughout the year to conform to a seasonal industry calendar that overlaps itself with successive collections.



# CROWTHER/PLANT AW '17 COLLECTION SCHEDULE

## SEPTEMBER 2016:

RANGE PLAN AND STORY  
INITIAL IDEAS AND DETAILING

CCCU MODULE PROJECT PLAN

ORDER FABRIC  
SOURCE ALTERNATIVES

## OCTOBER 2016:

TURN ANOTHER YEAR OLDER  
HALF TERM GET AWAY

ORDER TRIMMINGS  
CONFIRM AND PAY FOR SHOWS  
BOOK PRODUCTION WITH FACTORY  
ORDER PRODUCTION FABRIC  
NEW GARMENTS DRAWN  
NEW GARMENT FIRST SAMPLES IN HOUSE PLUS CHANGES

## NOVEMBER 2016:

NEW GARMENT PATTERNS DONE AND SENT TO FACTORY  
TO SAMPLE

DAUGHTERS BIRTHDAY NOV 3RD

PRINT PANELS AND SEND TO FACTORY

CCCU STUDENTS GETTING NEEDY TOWARDS END OF  
MODULE

DYE PANELS AND SEND  
DESIGN PLACEMENT PRINTS AND COLOUR STORY

CCCU MARK WORK  
CHILD OFF SCHOOL SICK

## DECEMBER 2016:

SAMPLES BACK FROM FACTORY  
GARMENT DYE

FORGOTTEN SOMETHING

PLACEMENT PRINT GARMENTS  
BOOK MODEL AND PHOTOGRAPHER  
FACTORIES CLOSED FOR CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR  
TERM 2 MODULE PROJECT PLAN  
FAMILY CHRISTMAS  
KIDS OFF SCHOOL

JANUARY 2017:

PHOTOSHOOT, RETOUCH, LINESHEET AND LOOKBOOK  
30 HOURS WORKING STRAIGHT  
LAST SAMPLES SENT STRAIGHT TO SHOW  
LONDON FASHION WEEK JAN 4-9TH 2017  
PARIS JAN 19-25TH 2017  
LONDON TRADE SHOW JAN 26-28TH  
SPRING PRODUCTION WITH FACTORY

FEBRUARY 2017

COMPLETE PRODUCTION  
DELIVER SPRING 17  
SHOWROOM APPOINTMENT

START AGAIN

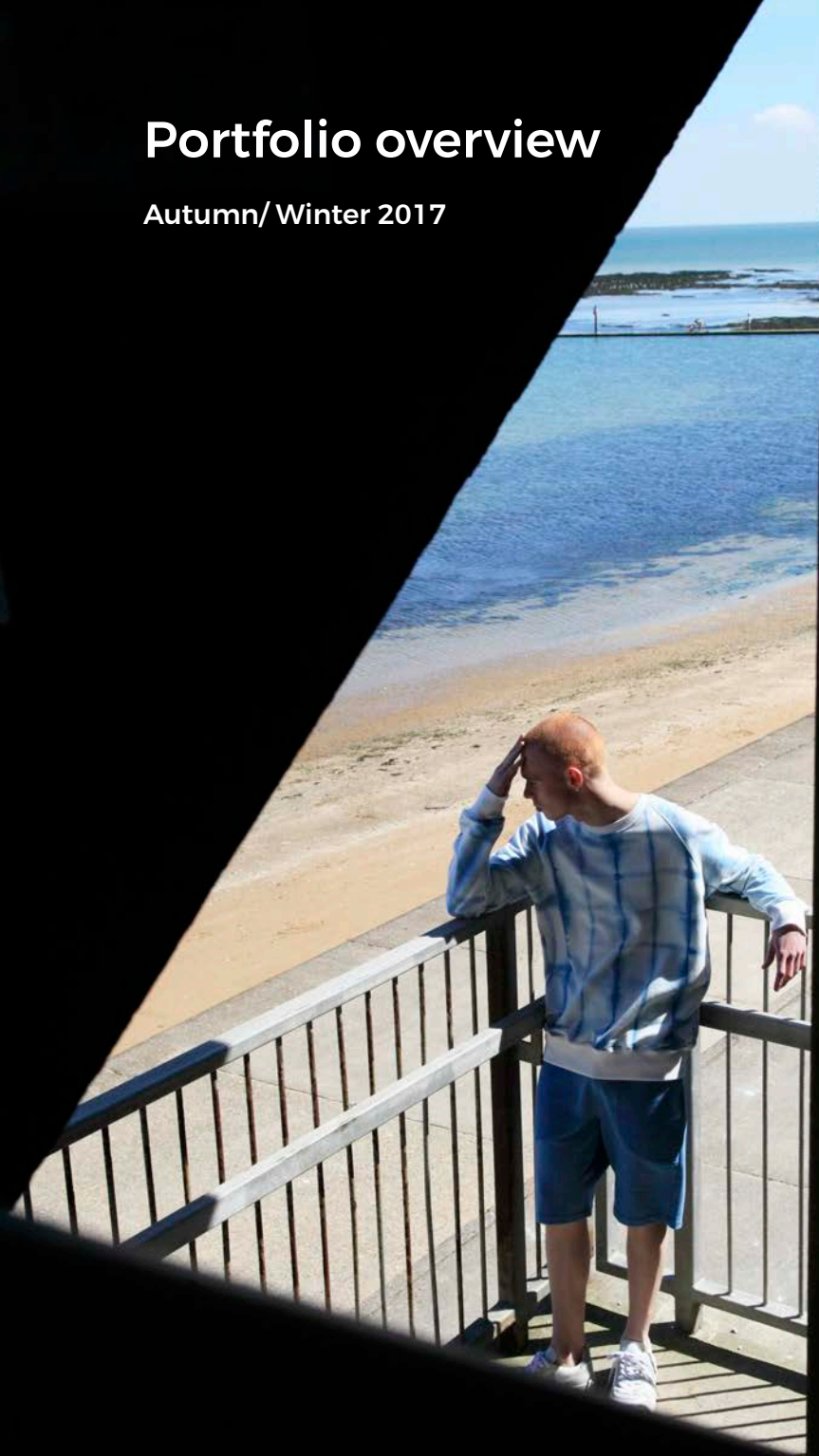
This timeline runs simultaneously with every other strand of my practice. CROWTHER/PLANT has grown to become the dominant area of my practice during this period. This season was the first time we had been supported by the British Fashion Council (BFC) invited to showcase the Autumn/Winter 2017 collection in January 2017 at London Men's Fashion Week and Paris Fashion Men's Week. The BFC chooses just a handful of designers each season to represent the best of British menswear in Paris, with buyers from the world's top stores coming through the showroom:

Launched in 2010, LONDON show ROOMS Men is a key part of the BFC's commitment to supporting and mentoring emerging British designers, providing them with a unique opportunity to promote themselves outside of London. The initiative has grown season on season, galvanising support for London's most promising menswear talents including Astrid Andersen, Christopher Kane, Christopher Raeburn, J.W. Anderson and Nasir Mazhar. Designers are selected based on optimum opportunity to engage local media, retailers, stylists and the broader fashion communities around the globe (British fashion council, 2017)

During this working period Catherine, my business partner, was away on maternity leave, leaving the design and management of Autumn/Winter 2017 largely my responsibility. Having worked together towards this goal for over two years, this was to be a big step for the brand, recognition from the industry establishment for our work in sustainable menswear design and exposure to a wider audience.

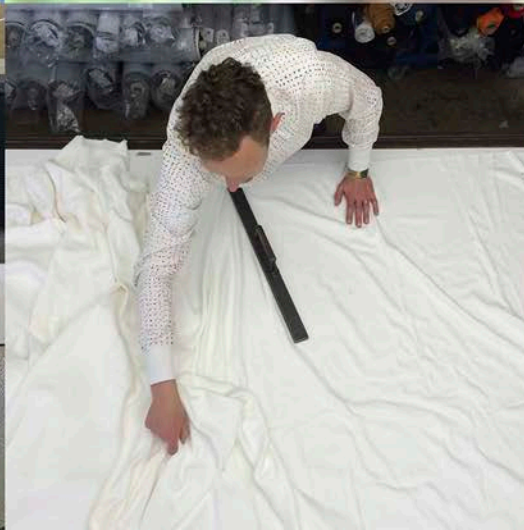
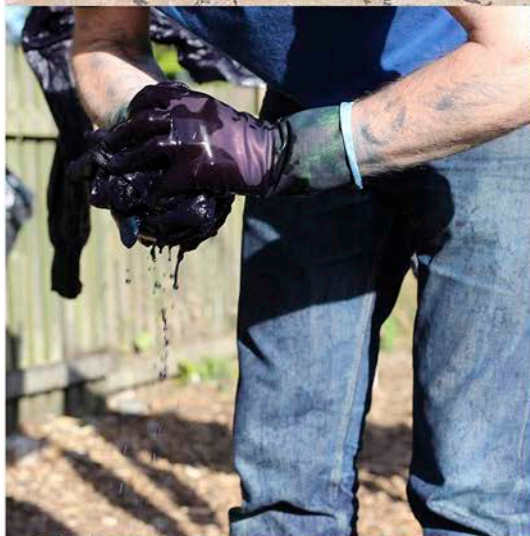
# Portfolio overview

Autumn/Winter 2017



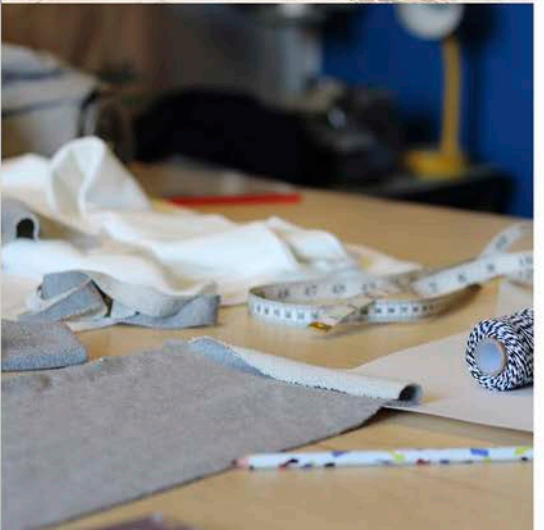
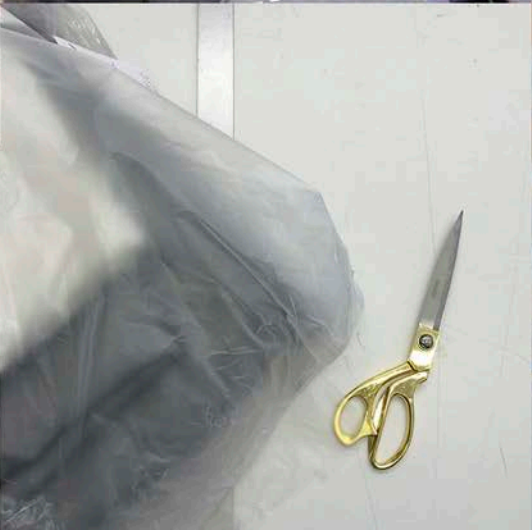


ORGANIC - SUSTAINABLE - INDIGO - MARGATE - BY THE SEA  
WWW.CROWTHERPLANT.COM @CROWTHERPLANT





Each seasonal collection starts with a moodboard, it is important to continue the brand tone of voice. I design with a solid foundation of what came before to initiate a new narrative pathway. In this way each collection has a nod to the brand story as well as room for its own creative journey.





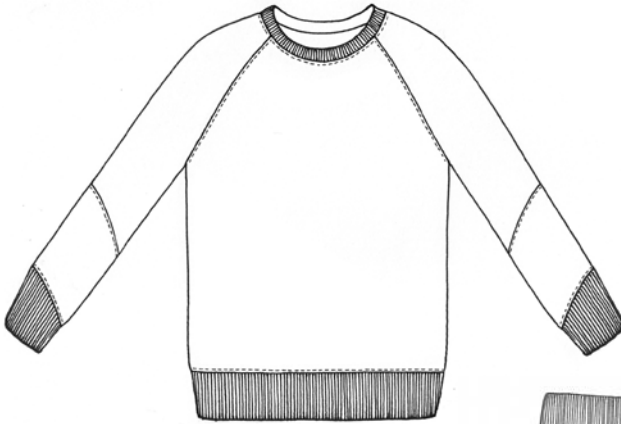
1. Emrys Plant, 2016, *Crowther/Plant sweatshirt design visualisation*

*Initial sketches are further worked to help decide which ideas to follow up.*



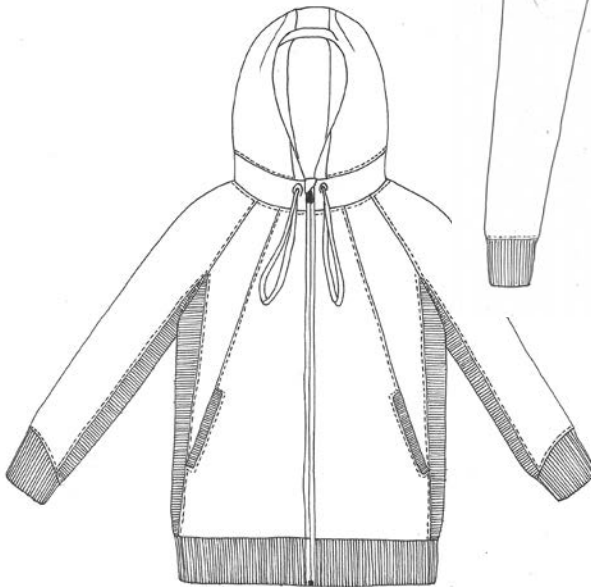
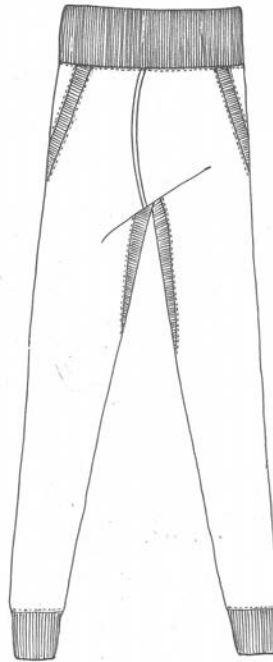
2. Emrys Plant, 2016, *Crowther/Plant long-sleeve and jogger design visualisation*





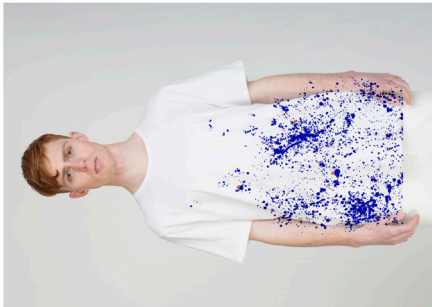
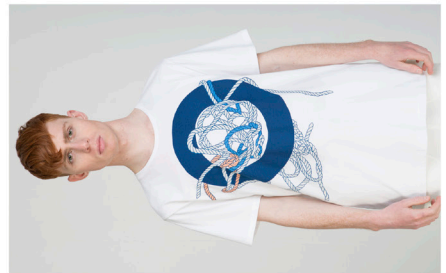
*3. Crowther/Plant garment design flats, for pre-print visualisation.*

Before making a sample, each garment is drawn out to visualise form and details. Once this is done the sketches are used on production sheets and collection outlines.



4. Crowther/Plant sweatshirt range plan visualisation.

As well as sketches, I use previous model shots to visualise garments together to see how they will form a collection story. This can be almost collaged from scans and sketches before print artwork is finalised to make the silk screens.





5. Table screen printing fabric in panels for sweatshirts.

I printed the fabric in lengths of up to eight metres at a time, once printed the fabric is cut into panels ready to go to the factory. The water based ink dries quickly in the screen so printing has to be continuous.





6. Garments being dyed with natural indigo outdoors.

Using this natural process I could only dye twelve items a day. The process is very time consuming but gives a wonderful depth of colour.

Each dye vat lasts for a day before it has to be revived. For this collection I experimented with folding panels before dyeing them. The process is known as shibori and originates from Japan.





7. Studio photoshoot is booked with a model, we also have location shots on the same day to make the most of the photographer and the model's time.



8. Garment prints are printed onto samples in the studio, this gives me total control over placement, colours and more time to tweak designs.



9. Final images are selected and re-touched ready for the look-book.







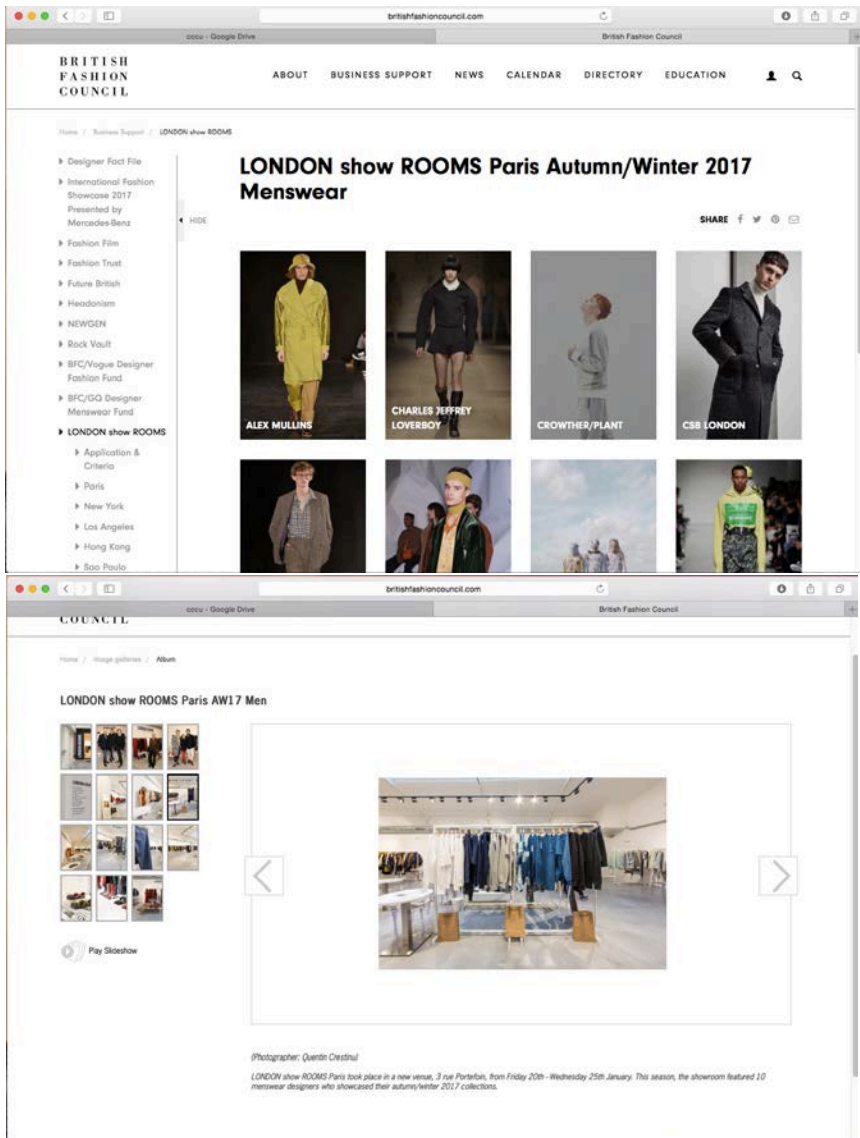
10. A selection of final garment images for look-book.

These images are used for marketing at trade shows and for the brand website once the season comes to sale.





11. London mens fashion week. I attended the event with the collection as part of the menswear showcase.



12. After London mens fashion week came Paris mens fashion week. The BFC showcased the brand on its webpage and marketed the showcase events to their global network of buyers.

NEW VENUE

AW17 MEN PARIS

Alex Mullins  
Crowther/Plant  
CSB London  
E. Tautz  
Edward Crutchley  
Ka Wa Key  
Liam Hodges  
Mannisto

MAN Designers:  
Charles Jeffrey  
Per Götesson

13. The BFC showcases shortlisted designers many of whom have gained sponsorship and awards

# LONDON SHOW ROOMS

3 Rue Portefoin, Marais  
Paris, 75003

Showroom Open

Friday 20.01.17 – Wednesday 25.01.17

10.00 – 20.00 (closing at 19.00 on 25.01.17)

For information and showroom appointments:  
[lsr@britishfashioncouncil.com](mailto:lsr@britishfashioncouncil.com)

#londonSHOWrooms

[londonshowrooms.co.uk](http://londonshowrooms.co.uk)



PROUD TO SUPPORT



BRITISH  
FASHION  
COUNCIL

AW17 MEN



LONDON ROOMS

PARIS



Life Ring t-shirt  
100% organic cotton  
S M L XL  
hand screen printed  
Centre back seam  
Made in England  
wholesale £27  
RRP £75



HI LO t-shirt  
100% organic cotton  
S M L XL  
hand screen printed  
Centre back seam  
Made in England  
wholesale £25  
RRP £70



Seaweed t-shirt  
100% organic cotton  
S M L XL  
hand screen printed  
Centre back seam  
Made in England  
wholesale £25  
RRP £70



All At Sea Sweatshirt  
100% organic cotton  
S M L XL  
grey, white, black  
Centre back seam  
Made in England  
wholesale £48  
RRP £130



Ray Hood  
100% organic cotton  
Leather reinforcement, swiss eyelet  
and rope detail  
M L  
grey  
Made in England  
wholesale £65  
RRP £175



All At Sea Sweatpant  
100% organic cotton  
Leather reinforcement, swiss eyelet  
and rope detail  
M L  
grey  
Made in England  
wholesale £55  
RRP £150



Open view Zip Hood  
100% organic cotton  
S M L XL  
Grey and Black  
Made in England  
wholesale £80  
£215



INDIGO  
Tie dye Sweatshirt  
100% organic cotton  
S M L XL  
Centre back seam  
Made in England  
wholesale £65  
RRP £175



INDIGO  
Oversize Sweatshirt  
100% organic cotton  
one size,  
mid Indigo  
Centre back seam  
Made in England  
wholesale £68  
RRP £185

Black  
wholesale £77  
RRP £155



INDIGO  
Ray Hood  
100% organic cotton  
swiss eyelet and rope detail  
M L  
Dark Indigo  
Made in England  
wholesale £80  
RRP £215



INDIGO  
All At Sea Sweatpant  
100% organic cotton  
swiss eyelet and rope detail  
M L  
Dark Indigo  
Made in England  
wholesale £65  
RRP £175

#### 14. Product line sheets

I have costed each set of garments and graded their size set. All samples have been factory made to make sure I can cost the production accurately. These line sheets are produced for buyers to mark up orders against whilst on the stand at the showroom.



## Critical reflection of practice

The Winter 2017 season met expectations for the brand. I met new customers and increased international sales as well as increasing brand exposure through attending both London and Paris fashion weeks. It was a confidence boost to also have support and recognition from the British fashion industry trade body (BFC). Domestically our sales increased slightly and I was able to keep on top of order fulfilment to existing stores. Production during this period was manageable, relying on sound manufacturing relationships and early development work, Catherine's absence was however very keenly felt. Creatively the collection built upon existing silhouettes and graphic stories, keeping down new development work whilst maintaining our brand voice. I did feel that even though there had been positive developments, the brand positioning wasn't quite right and I knew that the offer had fallen short of my own expectations.

CROWTHER/PLANT is at the top of my work priority list. It offers self-managed creative freedom and commercial opportunity, as well as fulfilling ethical design ideals. A fully rounded undertaking, it provides an ideal opportunity to explore the conditions that influence my plural creative practice.

Managing the brand through this period was challenging. Firstly, there was increased demand on my time brought about by the invitation to two high profile shows, made problematic by not being able to share responsibilities with my business partner. The increased time demand had a deep impact on the way I managed all other areas of my creative practice. Secondly, the CROWTHER/PLANT collection is built in collaboration, creating a richness and dialogue within the design story.

Right from the start I've been a collaborator – I wouldn't be able to do what I do if I didn't have someone else ... I can write a song and all that sort of stuff obviously, but the implementing of that song and doing it in interesting ways is very much a collaborative effort (Cave cited in Beadle, 2015, p.86).

During this period I worked very much in isolation on a project built for two. Creatively this felt compromised, I felt a flatness in the design, perhaps a bluntness that came from being rushed and designed

alone. Lastly the financial pressure as a start-up business is particularly acute, during this period the business reached the end of its start-up funding and did not have enough money to pay my salary, in effect I was working at COWTHER/PLANT for free. ‘Success involves piling failure upon failure (and minor achievement upon minor achievement) so they eventually form an edifice that might look from the outside, to myopic or to the outsider to the process to resemble a cohesive whole, a coherent body of work’ (Beadle, 2017, p.55)

Time is a dominant condition influencing this case study, time management and time sensitive decision making have a strong bearing on this part of my practice. The sheer volume of work to be completed in a short time period, made the development of the Autumn/Winter 2017 collection so intense that my ability to cover all tasks was compromised. The preparation of print graphics were not fully developed; some collection samples were made in-house and not at the factory and supporting photography and costings sheets for the sales shows were not ready on time. The extra time spent in the CROWTHER/PLANT studio took time away from other areas of creative practice during this period. This led to a feeling of disconnection between the areas of practice as creatively there was less being shared, less poetry, less visual continuity.

In trying to understand the way time is managed across a plural creative practice I looked to self-employed creative practitioners for insight.

I interviewed Tom Adams, a theatre maker, writer, director, actor, performer, composer and musician about how he manages his practice. I had recently seen Adams perform a version of a new stage show *Elephant and Castle* and had been interested in his biography that pointed towards a plurality in his practice.

I’ve got all these things that I enjoy doing, I love playing music and I love making people laugh I love writing stories and telling those stories if there is a way, that magic venn diagram where I can combine all of them in the same place and get paid to do that full time.... that’s why I do try and write shows that have comedy story-telling and music in. If I can do all of those in the same spot then wow that is the sweet spot right there (Adams, 2017).

There is an attempt to combine the different parts of Adams's practice so they can co-exist, happen all at the same time building plural creative content for a mixed performance. Adams explains how he manages his workload:

If I'm getting an Arts Council application off, it'll take me 2-3 months to start it and the final 3 weeks will be solid.. I've got a 5 year plan. I started one 3 years ago and now I'm 3 years into an 8 year plan... I've extended it (Adams, 2017).

There is a definite long term strategy that sounds manageable and productive, Adams reveals this was due to having a producer mentor him 3 years ago during his first funding application. A six week wait for a decision from ACE follows, which if successful launches two months of rehearsals that precede three months of touring. From start to finish this is a 9-12 month schedule, mapped out even before the creative idea has been developed and the show has been written. Tom comes across as a strategic and realistic time planner, slow and steady, apportioning enough time to each stage of a project that leaves room for everything else in life. There is cohesion to his practice that combines the creative elements of comedy, acting and music, into one show. The creation of a single outcome appears to be a product of a linear creative path but is in fact made up of many creative inputs that inform each other. There are however familiar cautionary experiences:

I took on too much, a job with a theatre company writing music for them as well as writing for my own theatre show and then a third job came in for a puppet theatre company just a couple of days and remember that's what pushed me over the edge, just the headspace, I got to give you my actual... I can't just rock up and twiddle music I've got to get in to a different space and give you what you want (Adams, 2017).

Something that Adams said resonated with me regarding work time and family, although not a parent himself, he is carrying his experience of childhood forward with him in his new show *My dad the magician*. Trying to bridge the gap between what parents do to keep a home running and a child's understanding:

What someone does for a living to survive, get by, to provide....  
My show is trying to help children understand what their  
parents might do for a living..... bridging the gap between  
understanding each other (Adams, 2017).

The deepest impact of my increased work load during this period of work has been on family life. Time spent at the studio outside of normal working hours (9-5 Monday to Friday) was time taken away from my family. There was a definite work/life imbalance over a period of six months, a situation I had created that now limited my time with my family, I made a difficult choice to be at work instead of at home. It was only possible to dedicate this time to work because my wife was able to care for our children and run our home. With working hours in the UK already topping the European averages at 43.1 hours per week (Blyton et al, 2013, p.97), it is obvious I cannot sustain working nearly 60 hours a week. As a parent this made me unsatisfied, as our family dynamics had reverted to more traditional gender working roles that we had been trying to re-balance. This compromise had been reached by the necessity to complete a high workload in a defined time on a tight budget. Lessons learned here go beyond managing time. Artist and theorist Emma Cocker suggests that slowing down routines, creating breaks, can increase the capacity to react with more intensity and effectiveness when the time is right (Cocker, 2016, p.47).

Financial conditions were an influence during this project, predominantly as there was very little pay for the work I produced. In this instance the development of the brand and business took priority over personally taking a salary. CROWTHER/PLANT was still within the three year start-up period and was unlikely to be making good profit for another twelve months. The lack of a salary during this time was planned, with lecturing work providing the money needed to sustain family life. It is interesting to acknowledge here that there was never any question as to whether my work on CROWTHER/PLANT was meaningful without receiving pay, the creative outlet made it worthwhile. With a different approach, it is interesting to see how Tom Adams has a prescribed financial structure within his funding bids that gives him a planned income to sustain all parts of his projects.

Creatively this period of design felt isolated and visually lacked the usual energy created as part of a team, however the design process was

carried out in a very similar way with a common ethos. What is clear, is that glimpses of successful product are apparent due to the adherence to a set of established design ideas and understanding of the product over and above a visual outcome.

Creative endeavour, physically making, crafting an idea into life is at the root of my creative practice. The act of making is an act of learning, thinking and enjoyment, much more than a process for production. 'People can learn about themselves by the things they make' (Sennett, 2008, p.8).

This notion of learning and thinking through doing is applicable through all my creative work for CROWTHER/PLANT; digital graphics, film, garment design or web based output, there is a craft in practice. Peter Korn reflects on his practice as a furniture maker in much the same way: 'I was thinking my way visually, thinking with materials and tools rather than with words' (Korn, 2017, p.59).

Physical practice, as a space for thinking through making, has the potential to offer vital connections in a plural creative practice. Amongst the diversity of a multi-discipline practice there must be common concepts, ideas and threads of thought, in order to build a sense of continuity and wholeness else the practice could appear disjointed.

Collaboration is key to the development of CROWTHER/PLANT, collaborative dialogue enriches our creative process; bouncing ideas between each other to solve problems and encouraging confidence in our design abilities. We do also work in *cooperation*, working alongside each other on separate tasks, however it is the collaborative working where Catherine and I have been able to work on tasks together that can also make the most of our time. Very often jobs such as image selection, photo editing or sample making can be done working together, we make decisions more effectively with the benefit of both our inputs and our skills; there is definite coauthorship. Although inspiration comes individually, the development of this creative practice was more successful while working in collaboration. Cited as a key element of plural practice, the influence of collaboration, is a firm condition on the CROWTHER/PLANT brand. Finkelpearl, (2013, pp.20-24) suggests that working in collaboration with others on a project, where collaboration steers the creative process, can evolve into the creative process itself becoming the work, the journey together considered the art rather than the outcome. Certainly there is a clear sense of purpose and enjoyment when working in collaboration on the brand, that is not

fully embodied in the product when taken out of this context.

Collaboration as coauthorship in this creative partnership is perhaps best defined with the help of Finkelpearl's illustration:

Collaboration often refers to teams such as Gilbert and George or collectives such as Group Material. It implies a shared initiation of the art, and start- to- finish coauthorship. We have no clue what Gilbert or George has independently contributed to one of their photographs, or what Doug Ashford, Julie Ault, Tim Rollins, or Felix Gonzalez-Torres individually contributed to a given Group Material installation. And even if we do understand that W. S. Gilbert wrote the words and Arthur Sullivan composed the music, there is a clear acknowledgment of equal coauthorship in a Gilbert and Sullivan opera (Finkelpearl. 2013, p.6).

The personal development during this study is indelible: I have been dishonest with myself in what I can achieve in the time I have allocated to practice, not wasteful, but dishonest. The work load for CROWTHER/PLANT was too great to take on alone without conceding to pause other areas of my practice. I ignored the need to plan for Catherine's absence and consequently there was a negative impact on my family time as I struggled through the studio work in the evenings. I naively thought I could shoulder this workload by adhering to a more streamlined design process, however there was still just too much to do. A sustainable practice requires the balance of time across demanding inputs. Planned, communicated, strategic and realistic time management requires honesty with oneself and those around you.

Philosophically, time is both a fixed entity and constantly moving, a load that needs resettling regularly; balanced for just moments by the unevenly distributed demands of creative practice, family life, employed paid work and relaxation, before being unsettled by these same changing weights and needs. Debord (1970, p.126) describes this existence as being in a 'perpetual present ....Time remains immobile, like an enclosed space'. I am keenly aware that my work/life balance can exist in this busy bubble, a perpetual present, with only the time to react to what is in front of me, causing nothing to actually move forward.

Managing time effectively to facilitate the influences of creativity, collaboration and financial sustainability is a key skill for a plural

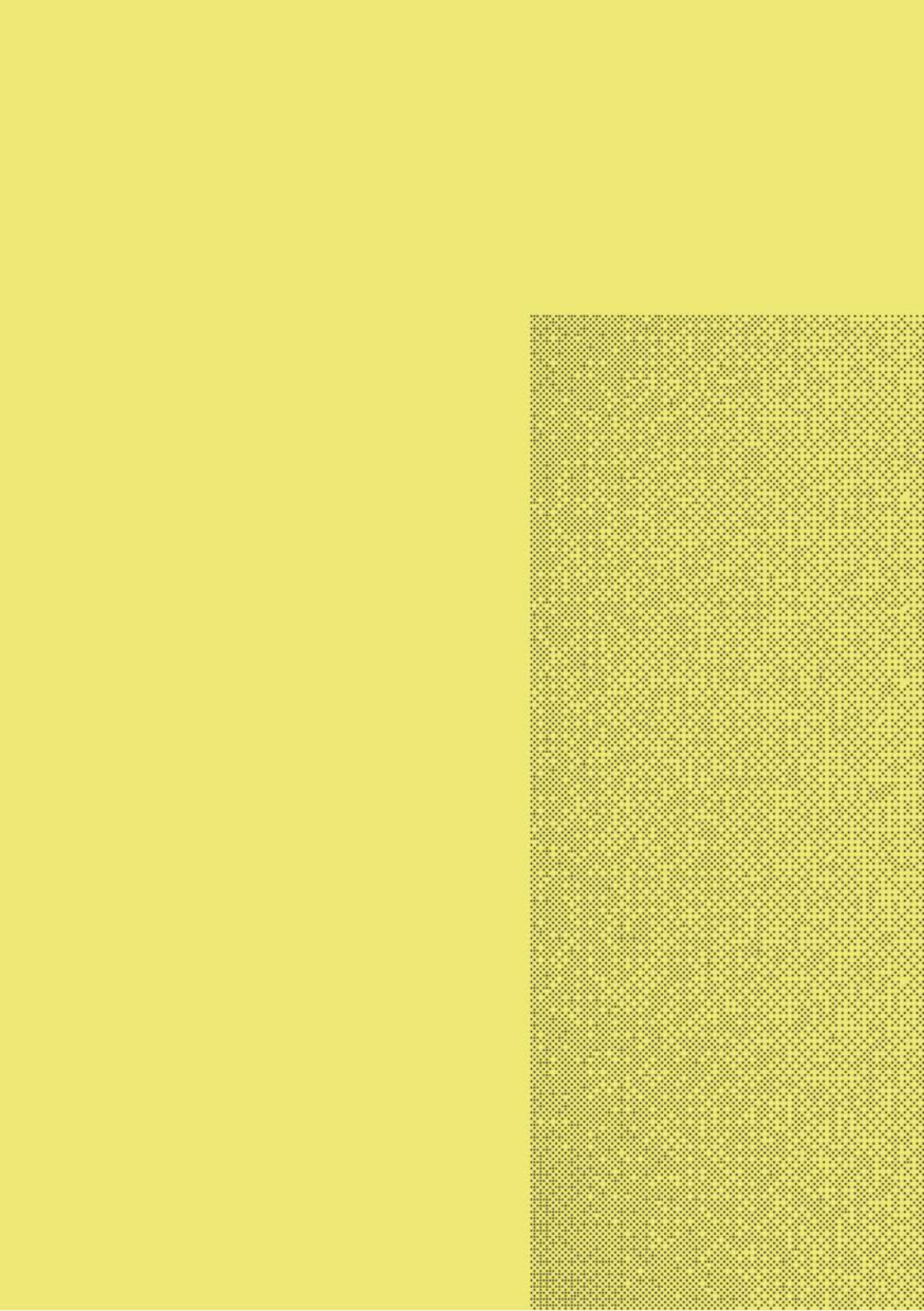
creative practitioner to master. Time is a bank: what is invested in must also be withdrawn in reward.

Interviewee: Tom Adams

Interview length 45:57

Design portfolio: CROWTHER/PLANT AW17

Location: Margate, London and Paris





# 3/ Visual Arts practice



## Visual arts practice: Positive protest

*Value – worth – collaboration – exchange – inspiration – survival – volunteer– socially engaged – relationships*

### Introduction

I have developed a contemporary visual arts practice that exists predominantly in the public realm. There is a strong socially engaged aspect to my work, often produced in collaboration with organisations, with a focus on community engagement and education. Socially engaged ‘deals with a practice where artists engage with people, usually non-artists, through a process of collaboration and dialogue as a way of creating events, encounters, activism as well as art objects’ (Butler *et al*, 2007, p.10). Importantly this engagement is characterised by Butler (2007) as having an ‘emphasis on collective rather than individual creativity’. I am interested in exploring domestic yet uncomfortable narratives in my work, building on tensions and anxieties that exist between myself, the community it sits in and the viewer, often finding narrative, humour and playfulness in the familiarly awkward. Physical outcomes take their form and material direction from the commissioning brief and with relevance to the concept and working group. This area of work is often informed by and in turn also inspires the poetry and performance area of my practice. I am seeking a visual poetry to produce a physical form for the ideas that drive it. My recent works lean towards intervention, installation, performance and ephemeral relationships with place and audience.

This area of visual arts practice is creatively developed alongside poetic narratives whilst taking structure from my work in education as a part time lecturer. In this context I use the term ‘poetic narratives’ to encapsulate how I use expressive, figurative and emotional visual language (poetry) to tell a story or message that has come from the situation and people I am working with. I have a passion for encouraging creativity in young people and sharing my knowledge, helping to develop wider creative understanding and assisting the growth of shared ideas.

As a founder and director of Resort Studios CIC I have been on a journey that has connected the needs of a disadvantaged community

with the needs of a creative community through a common creative language. At Resort I have helped sensitively steer the growth of a studio space for over forty creative practices to flourish in one of the most deprived areas in the South East, this has also given me an appreciation of socially engaged arts practice from a commissioning and strategic point of view. During this period of masters study, I found it necessary to step down as a director of Resort Studios after four years to concentrate on my personal development.

## **Selected practice history**

- 2012 The Batons – commission for Ashford council as part of the Cultural Olympics.  
Caught in the web – sculptural intervention for Craftspace and The NEC, Birmingham.
- 2014 Sticks and Stones – sculptural interventions commission for Margate festival of colour  
As the Crow Flies – solo exhibition, Resort Gallery space, Margate.
- 2016 Film commission for International festival of projections, Kent University Canterbury
- 2017 Positive protest – education commission for Folkestone Triennial.
- 2018 Arts Education Exchange – Lead artist working with young people excluded from mainstream education in Margate.

More examples of work can be found at: [www.jamemrrys.com](http://www.jamemrrys.com)



1. Above: Emrys Plant, 2014, *Sticks and stones*.

Temporary sculptural interventions around Margate, pictured at Turner Contemporary  
Below: Emrys Plant, 2012, *The Batons*. Assembled musicians playing as The Batons at  
*Create* festival Ashford.



## Portfolio documentation

For the purposes of this study I would like to focus on a visual arts project I carried out in June 2017. I began work on a project with Folkestone Creative Foundation to deliver an arts education and engagement programme for the forthcoming Folkestone Triennial. I have worked with the Creative Foundation as an artist and facilitator for eight years and have built a positive relationship with the organisation.

The project required a proposal that would engage local schools and the public with one of the festival commissions by the international contemporary artist Bob and Roberta Smith. I proposed a set of workshops titled *Positive Protest* that fulfilled the need for a socially engaged platform to co-create artistic and activist-led work to the identified public groups and festival audiences.



2. Bob and Roberta Smith, 2017, *Folkestone is an art school*. Commissioned by the Creative Foundation for Folkestone Triennial 2017. Images by Thierry Bal.





2a. Bob and Roberta Smith, 2017, *Folkestone is an art school*. Commissioned by the Creative Foundation for Folkestone Triennial 2017.

Bob and Roberta (one man, real name Patrick Brill) created a series of pedagogical films to support his Triennial commission. I used these films to introduce teachers from the Folkestone area to contemporary arts practice.

The project work I carried out had two distinct parts to its delivery:

1. Plan and deliver workshops to local teachers that would engage them with Bob and Roberta's manifesto promoting his idea of 'FOLKESTONE IS AN ART SCHOOL'. Enable the teachers to take creative lead in running sessions in their own schools that identify with and take ownership of Folkestone as a creative hub. These sessions centred on using Bob and Roberta's recorded inspiration material (<http://www.folkestonetriennial.org.uk/artist/bob-an>). I ran workshops on how to use type as form in visual art and how to communicate a positive sense of place.
2. Plan and deliver three full day workshops for school groups and the general public to make positive protest statements about issues that were personally and creatively important to attendees and linked to Folkestone. Workshops focussed on visual typography and message as core creative assets.



3. Emrys Plant, 2017, *Positive Protest*. Commissioned by the Creative Foundation for Folkestone Triennial 2017. *Positive Protest* consisted of a series of workshops with school groups, teachers and the public to create political statements on placards.

During the workshop delivery I used local signage found on guided walks to inspire the groups with a place specific visual response to Folkestone. The artist-led walk was also used as an opportunity for the groups to think about positive, creative messages that the individuals would like to make into statements.

Studio time was spent using paints, felt pens and pencils to draw these statements on to placards. The placard format was chosen as a deliberately lo-fi presentation in keeping with Bob and Roberta Smith's own typographic style and politically active messages.





4. *Positive Protest, 2017*. Schools workshop. Students thought of their own statements to encourage creativity.



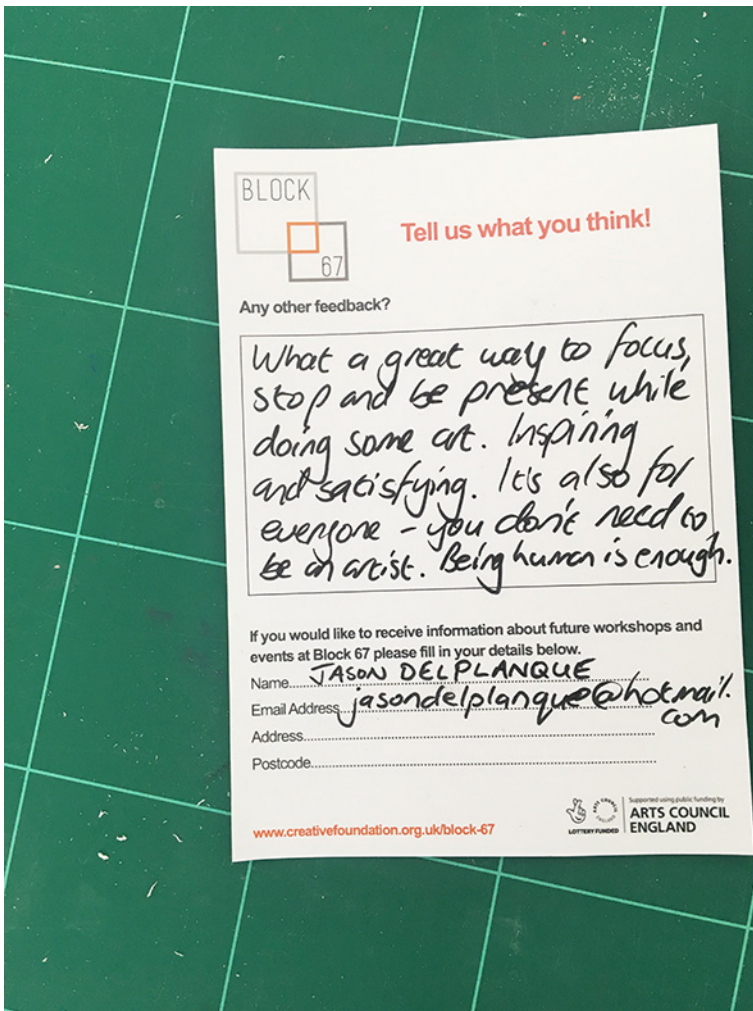


5. *Positive Protest, 2017*. Public workshop. Members of the public dropped in during the Triennial to make their own placards that they took with them around town, spreading positive messages





6. *Positive Protest, 2017*. Public placard. Members of the public dropped in during the Triennial to make their own placards, personalised messages focused on issues that were of concern to the individual, they took them around town, spreading positive messages.



7. Positive Protest, 2017. Public feedback.

## Project review

This project, like no other in recent times, made me think hard about my role as an artist and facilitator. I applied for and was awarded this project based on my ideas to deliver the aims of the creative foundation. This was an important part of their education delivery through the Triennial festival. On reflection, I can honestly admit to myself that I was most attracted to the project by the fee that was offered. It is cynical and somewhat shameful that I find myself in a position where I have taken good creative opportunities only for the money.

Creatively the project did not offer what I was looking for in terms of personal exploration and development, nor was it in line with my recent direction, however I was in need of the artists fee attached to the commission. I also hoped to nurture an element of collaboration with the lead artist Bob and Roberta Smith to energise the creative direction but this did not become part of the project.

The workshops lasted between two and four hours and were designed to be a socially engaged platform that started with an artist-led introduction to instigate a response from attendees. These responses could then be used to open a dialogue with myself to enable co-created visual outcomes. This public element of *Positive Protest* was a mirror to the participatory and co-created work taking place within Bob and Roberta Smiths' Folkestone art school summer school.

My financially driven motivation for this project work could have compromised delivering a successful outcome for my client; I felt selfish and guilty that I had accepted the work. I recognise that it is very difficult to work with creative passion all the time, sometimes our heart just isn't in it, but we can and must work through projects with appropriate structure and a client focussed delivery. I worked hard to deliver some great workshops, with a happy client and happy participants, all the time feeling that another artist could have benefitted more from the experience. Although in this case I undertook the work only for the money and not for creative development, there have been benefits; my relationships within the organisation have been strengthened, I have developed closer personal bonds that will last and grow, I have another good-looking CV project under my belt. In future I should be more honest with myself over my motivations towards projects before taking on work I am not best positioned to do.



8. Claire Orme, 2017, *A Sirens Nocturne*. Image by Liene Cesar.

## Critical reflection

Money is a primary influence on many areas of practice, be it the affordability and finance of a personal project or the pay on offer for a commission. Financial reward can influence the creative decision making process right at the beginning, signalling which ideas to develop and which enquiries to follow. Being paid well for a creative project can at times be a stimulus, an indication of worth and quality and a motivation to thoroughly explore an idea, dive deep into the creative process and go on to deliver successful outcomes. At the very least being able to finance creative work can potentially buy the time needed to develop. Equally there is the potential for finance to be a compromising factor, limiting access, time, materials, exposure and at worst creative integrity. The writer Neil Gaiman gives advice to new graduates in a rousing speech warning that ‘Nothing I did where the only reason for doing it was the money was ever worth it except for bitter experience, I usually didn’t get the money either’ (Gaiman, 2012).

The plural practitioner Fred Deakin strengthens Gaiman’s cautionary warning, ‘Whenever I’ve done a project and money has been the



number one reason, it has always turned out to be an awful experience – and most of the time, the money evaporates and runs away and it turns out to be an average-earning job too’ (Deakin cited in Lacey 2014).

Financial sustainability is a key component of a sustainable working practice that helps grow a creative practice and satisfies responsibilities to home and family. There is a trade that takes place: goods or services in exchange for money. The creative industries in a commercial sense is seated firmly in our traditional western capitalist economy. In an individual practice the role of finance is far more nuanced for instance, as a self-employed person I am expected to earn an estimated 60% of what an employed person earns in an equivalent position (Kelly, 2017).

Claire Orme is an artist, musician and curator (as well as magazine archivist, researcher, design assistant and children’s camp co-ordinator). Orme is self-employed, she is an early career plural practitioner who keenly feels the effect of money on her practice. Orme runs Flat38 gallery, a contemporary domestic space, turned gallery, that hosts contemporary artist residencies, shows and performances. I interviewed Orme about her practice and as our conversation progressed there was a specific focus on how Orme manages financial sustainability in her practice:

I feel like I’m working 6 days a week and maybe end up with £800 and that’s a good month and yes (that does make me financially sustainable) but that’s on a good month, on a bad month if people only want me 1 day a week I’ll only make £400 then no. I get to the end of the year, working every day and wow.... I want to pay tax but... (Orme, 2017).

Kelly (2017) reveals there are around 1.7million self-employed people in the UK earning less than the minimum wage, the self-employed creative practitioner is amongst the lowest earners. For an artist such as Orme priorities lie in creative development rather than in earnings. Practitioners like Orme also find themselves working in the ‘gig’ economy, with little or no security in even regular work.

All the things I want to do never make much money. All the things I think will fulfil me and fulfil what I want to be doing are not big grand money making schemes I don’t want to make

lots of money, just enough to not worry about it (Orme, 2017).

Orme identifies with her creative needs over and above her financial needs, her sustainability does require a certain level of finance but is more heavily influenced by her need to be working on creatively meaningful projects:

I don't work harder if I'm being paid more... but then if I'm doing my own project I work harder for no money at all, things that I believe in. I could go and get an office job but I wouldn't be able to do it, I'd be there a week... I'd rather eat tins of tomatoes every day....Even months I haven't earned any money I find a way to survive (Orme, 2017).

Orme is currently the curator of LIMBO Arts public programme and project space in Margate, this is on an unpaid basis in exchange for a studio. The removal of money here brings her closer to her own practice, she cannot afford to pay for a studio but this exchange gets her a space of her own. These exchanges are common between people and organisations in the creative sector, I will 'pay' for a photographer or film maker to shoot for the CROWTHER/PLANT label by giving them clothes in return. Where money does not change hands there can still be an appreciation and value of creativity, a return to a barter system of fair goods/service exchange. Non-monetary exchanges and volunteering can be immensely fulfilling, an enriching career experience and creatively freeing. My role at Resort CIC is voluntary and has provided not only a cost effective studio to work from but a large network of contemporaries to work with.

Orme is very aware of the income she needs to earn each month and more-or-less achieves this but importantly, for her, money is not a primary motivator. Money is not the factor that increases the quality of work, she recognises she is most engaged in the things she believes in, rather than those which she gets paid most for. She has begun to develop other systems of exchange and believes creative practitioners, particularly artists are not money motivated.

Orme identifies that the web of financial streams make budgeting very difficult and learning from past financial years somewhat impossible for her.

A plural-practice is a creative 'portfolio career', Professor Fred

Deakin from UAL is a graphic designer, musician (the band Lemon Jelly), videographer and lecturer, he considers his professional practice as a portfolio of 'careers' rather than a traditional arts practice (Deakin cited in Lacey, 2014). Adrian Shaughnessy also recognises the shifting vocational landscape towards a multi-faceted career:

The world of work is changing faster than at any time in history. There will be no more jobs for life. People will have to do two, maybe three jobs just to survive. It might even mean combing paid employment with a freelance practice.  
(Shaughnessy cited in Ewin et al, 2014, p.79).

As a self-employed plural practitioner I have an income that is generated from many different practice streams. In any one financial year I will receive income from many different clients. Each strand of work commands its own rate of remuneration, terms of employment and payment and importantly each project has different levels of prospect for future earnings. Commonly, regardless of pay, each job is approached with professionalism and with creative integrity in the belief that if the client is kept happy they may come back to work with me again.

During this practice period I resigned my directorship of Resort studios, I found the increasing demands of this voluntary position having a negative impact on my work/life balance. The course of this study has identified the important conditions of time (book 2) and money on sustaining a creative practice. The Resort directorship required a commitment in time that I felt I could no longer offer; coupled with the situation where I was not receiving payment from CROWTHER/PLANT ( as detailed in book 2), I felt I needed to maximise my working time in order to earn the money needed to sustain family and practice.

Money and finance is too often an awkward subject to tackle for many creative practitioners who sometimes do not even seek money for their creative endeavours. For plural practitioners juggling multi-income streams this can be an added strain. Conversely, lack of finance can provide the necessity to think around problems and design solutions without money being a component for a successful outcome. A hard-up position can provide a valuable stand point from which to make successful work. It can often be found to be honest, sustainable and engaging work, democratic in its appeal and humble in its materiality

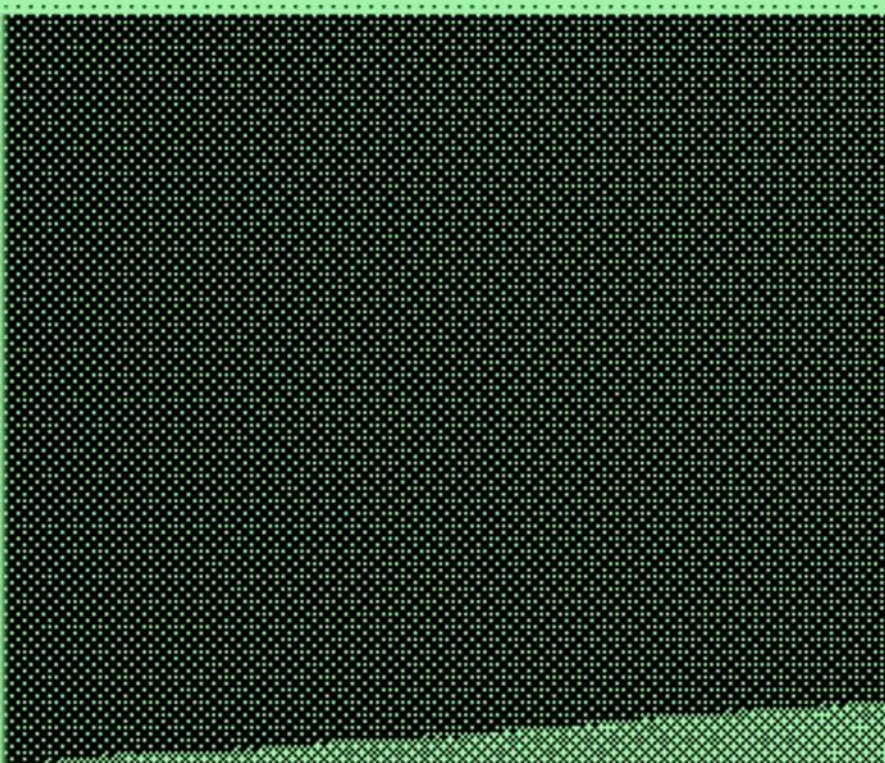
whilst showing signs of being intellectually developed.

Interviewee: Claire Orme

Interview length 49:50

Visual arts practice: Positive Protest – Folkestone Triennial

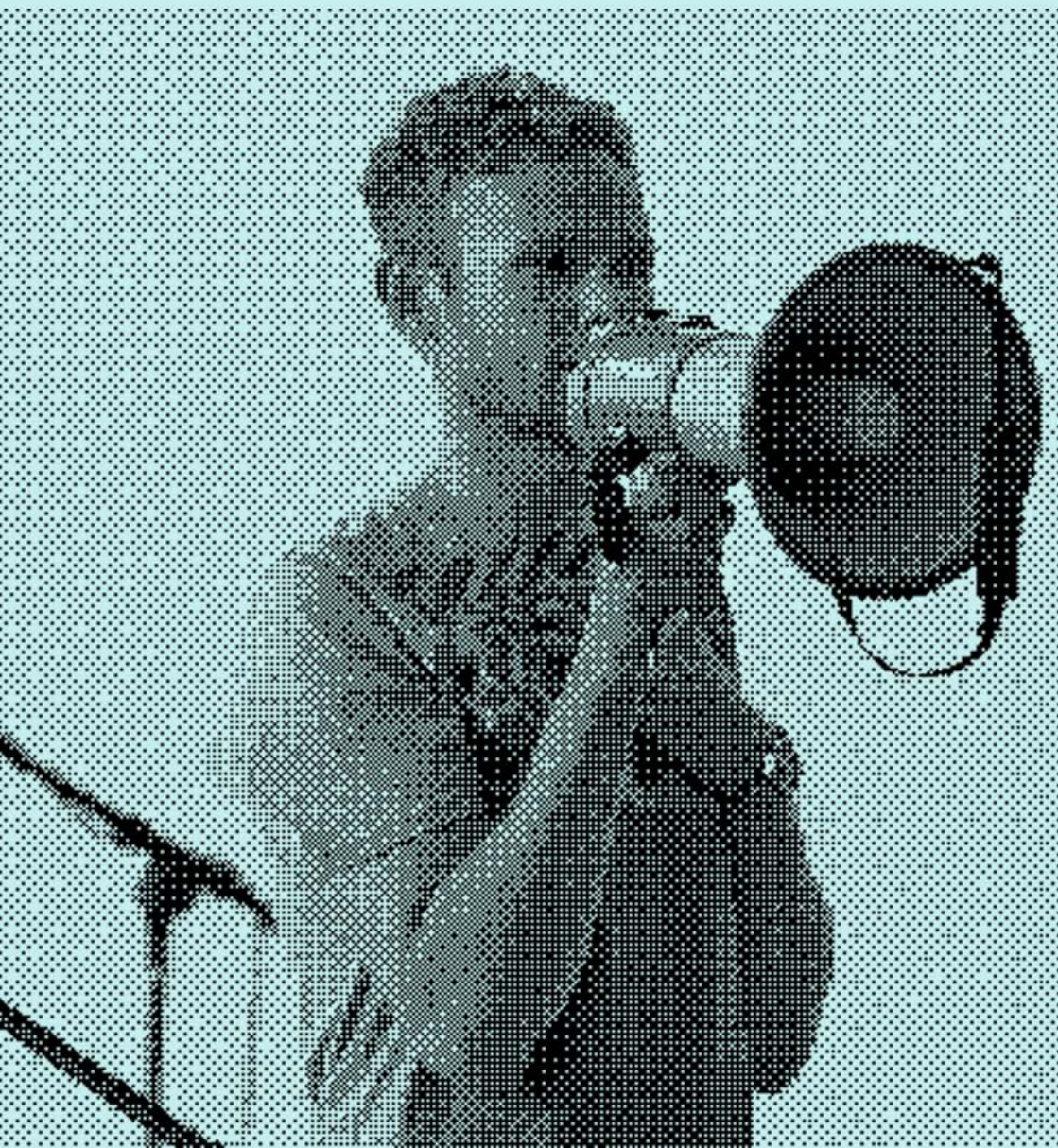
Location: Folkestone



**WAK**

4/

## Spoken word practice



## Spoken word practice: Family Matter

*Original thought – the hand – connection – appreciation – storytelling – ideas in the cracks in the pavement – who will pay for this – when will I do this – does the world need this – What gets left behind – what gets carried forward - Is it ever finished – natural development –do one thing and do it well.*

### Introduction

Narrative storytelling shapes my design language, providing a structure to articulate visually my ideas and the materials I work with. I refer to narrative as a method of storytelling that tells, often in abstract ways, a story that is open to audience interpretation. In book three I refer to narratives in my visual work in this context, using a story or message of either my own making or from a collaborator as a start point to shape the work. Increasingly these narratives were developing as written text forms in my visual work, separation from which allowed them to grow into valid written outputs in their own right. Riessman (2008, p.3) suggests there is an accepted interchange between the terms narrative and story: ‘the term *narrative* carries many meanings and is used in a variety of ways by different disciplines, often synonymously with *story*’. In order to define the term Riessman concedes there are difficulties in finding a simple definition but attempts to provide some clarity:

Briefly, in everyday oral storytelling, a speaker connects events into a sequence that is consequential for later action and for the meanings that the speaker wants listeners to take away from the story. Events perceived by the speaker as important are selected, organized, connected, and evaluated as meaningful for a particular audience. (Riessman, 2008, p.3)

In the context of my practice it is important also to note that Riessman claims this definition to be applicable not only to oral and written narratives but also to visual narratives.

Performance of these written pieces as spoken word poetry, mixes the physical setting (stagecraft) that may include props, with a performative presence using dramatic elements to create powerful and

entertaining storytelling. Dramatic elements identified by Cash (2011) such as tension, timing and rhythm can create a dramatic vehicle for the poem to be delivered.

I have been performing spoken word poetry since 2012, attending local poetry events and developing a craft as a performer. In 2014 I was invited to take part in a poetry slam hosted by Wise Words Festival, in a search for Canterbury's slam champion. Slam poetry is a format of friendly competition for poets that involves the audience 'judging' performances, showing their appreciation for lines, rhymes and delivery with clicks of fingers and scores, more akin to a well-mannered rap battle than a poetry reading. This format has helped make poetry events fun, friendly and enjoyable.

Taking my creative hobby further has been an interesting journey, from slam poetry events to festival performances to writing commissioned poems for national galleries.

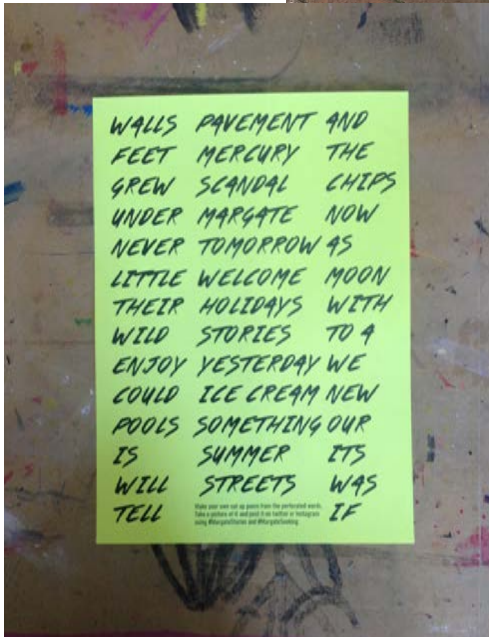


1. Emrys Plant with Luke Jackson, 2015, *We've got the stories*. Poem written for Wise Words festival promotion and fundraising campaign. A chance to work with BBC young folk musician of the year Luke Jackson, adapting the poem to music.



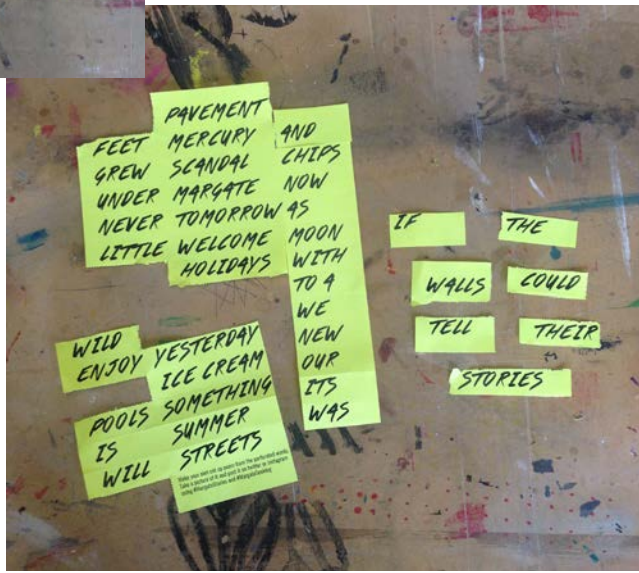


2. Emrys Plant, 2017, *Holiday dreams*. Margate festival  
Poems written with router on found pallets and returned to the streets of Margate.



3. Emrys Plant, 2017, *Margate stories*. Margate festival

Envelopes containing tear sheets of words were left on the streets of Margate to be found by members of the public to pick up and create their own poems.





## Lost for a minute

I hold your hand down foreign streets  
Warmed for expectant adventures  
Palms sticky  
Adhered by an unfamiliar heat  
I'll lose your grip in the maddening crowd  
From my platform I'll watch quiet panic unfold  
Your eyes become lost  
From the stalls of ripe fruit, Leather goods, Trinkets and tat  
Searching instead for your rock on which you so comfortably sat  
In this now terrifying sea  
Staring into strangers  
To find something so foreign you couldn't begin to explain  
I'm also helpless  
Ill climb down from my tower  
I'll take your hand  
I feel needed again

## Selected practice history:

- 2014 Wise Words festival slam champion  
Lead poet for *Spoke 'n' Word* Canterbury youth project  
Lounge on the Farm music festival - poets vs Mc's performance
- 2015 Poem used by author Sara Alexi in her novella *A song amongst the Orange trees*  
Wise Words festival feature performance in support of Kate Tempest.  
Commissioned poem for Wise Words working with musician Luke Jackson
- 2016 Performance at the Gulbenkian Theatre Canterbury in support of Lemn Sissay and Carol Ann Duffy  
Winner - Hammer and Tongues Brighton slam  
Performance at Jawdance London and feature performance at 451 Nuffield theatre Southampton
- 2017 Commissioned poem for the Wallace Collection, London.  
Commissioned to write *Family Matter* for Wise Words festival  
Performed *Family Matter* at Boing Festival – Kent University

## Process

Across my creative practice, I aim at all times to create with original thoughts and present original works. Creative integrity and provenance of ideas and materials are benchmarks for my work, alongside a belief that what I am doing is worthy and able to stand up to creative scrutiny. Writing poetry is a very personal and emotive creative connection that has developed naturally, given the space to be unforced with little expectation placed upon it. The inspirational focus for my poetry are my personal experiences, interactions, relationships and observations; I write about what I know. I write as and when inspired to, it feels like a very pure creative process, almost indulgent.

Honour the miraculousness of the ordinary. What we very badly need to remember is that the things right under our noses are extraordinary, fascinating, irreplaceable, profound and just kind of marvellous (Motion, cited in Feeney-Hart, 2014).

Performance poetry makes use of the style of delivery to elevate a piece of writing. Spoken word delivery is key to the success of a piece of performance poetry. The delivery, timing, emphasis, flow and physical presence brings the writing to life.

## Study Focus

The *Family Matter* spoken word show was commissioned by Wise Words poetry Festival in May 2017. Wise Words poetry festival has supported the development of my poetry since I first performed there in 2014. The festival is a week long celebration of poetry and spoken word, performed in venues across the city of Canterbury in Kent.

*Family Matter* is my first hour long spoken word show to be written on a single theme. The show was programmed as one of the headline festival performances. There was no financial funding attached to the commission, however there was directorial support and support in kind in the form of help with filming, sound technician and a rehearsal space.

I had full creative freedom when writing the show, unlike in other areas of my practice, here I did not have creative partners or external parameters to work with. The start of the creative process can sometimes feel too open, outside pressures and voices can help shape and form ideas and give structure. The only expectation I had when I started writing was to fill an hour-long performance slot.

The early concept for the show was to write about the experience of being a father without a handbook, this helped form a structure that could take the story on a journey. The show starts from the beginnings of fatherhood, sharing observations and events along the way, leading the listener right up to the present; in essence I was sticking to what I know.

Writing the show was at first a daunting prospect as it was a new experience for me. I approached writing with the same principles as I would apply to a visual project; I created a brief, developed a concept and shaped a style of delivery to aid me through the process. Applying design thinking to other areas of life or work can be beneficial to creative thinkers. In their book *Designing Your Life*, the authors Bill Burnett and Dave Evans suggest that ‘when you think like a designer you approach problems with an entirely different mind-set’ (Burnett and Evans, 2018, p.3). Burnett and Evans direct the *Life Design Lab* at Stanford University where they teach how the application of design

thinking can be a powerful structure for ‘designing’ your way forward in life and careers outside of design.

An hour-long performance was crafted, weaving together poems about family life and a naïve start to fatherhood. The poems were written from personal experiences, everyday stories that could provide opportunities for the listener to relate to and empathise with the position. I wrote new work with a purpose, I took existing poems and expanded them to tell the bigger stories. The editing process joined poems together, created links between poems and filled gaps with new writing until the show was bursting at the seams. It was important to tell a story that had a natural flow, taking the audience on an emotive wave that mirrored the ups and downs of the experiences I was trying to share.

The style of performance that evolved was warm and inclusive, involving the audience in the unfolding story. The audience were required to become part of the family and a family is not something you look on to from the outside, you are in it, taking part. The delivery of poems was fluid but punctuated with songs that the audience were encouraged to dance to as if at a family wedding, bringing a familiar feeling of togetherness and awkwardness in to the room. The poem *Family work out* requires an audience member to come on stage for a piggy-back and pretend to be my child, making the performance physical and impossible to escape. *Upstairs downstairs* is an ad-libbed farcical conversation with my children up an imaginary staircase that happens every morning and can be delivered with an audience member playing along.

The first performance of *Family Matter* at Wise Words festival was well attended by festival goers and well received by the audience. The creative satisfaction of writing and producing my own spoken word show far outweighed the fact there was no fee for the performance.

There is a case for ‘scaling down’ efforts in certain areas of my practice to achieve more work satisfaction as I found here. This can be likened to the greater depths and connectivity ‘scaling down’ or simplifying can achieve in the designed world (Meyerson, 2016). As a plural practitioner the diversity of what I do is paradoxically both the strength of my practice and its weakness. Providing a breadth to my skills, knowledge and employability but a tendency to overstretch and feel I am not working to as great a depth as I would like to. Scaling down or stripping back my practice is certainly a consideration.

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## **Portfolio: Family matter spoken word show**

The following poems were written for the *Family Matter* show during the masters study time. Included in this writing are performance notes that I made during rehearsals that are a guide for myself and the sound technician. The show was performed without reading or prompt and was delivered in a fun, family friendly tone. There are songs played throughout that the audience were encouraged to stand up and dance to.

**Keep an eye on time. Cut it down to stay on schedule if needed**

**Intro - Sister Sledge - We Are Family**

### **Notes:**

Welcome to the family - Audience participation - just like a family

Families that play together stay together

Dance like we're in the kitchen, family wedding

How it all started , how Heidi and I met

First dance – Whitney Houston – how do I know

## Gentle my love

You cut an elfin figure that casts quiet magic on the room  
Your gentle welcome is softly announced by the warm rays that beam  
from your sunshine smile  
What a smile  
Spreads calmness, spreads kindness without saying a word  
Words, words aren't your thing, you're more into listening  
Such a great listener  
You taught me how to open my ears whilst my gaze is firmly fixed on  
you  
You've had my eyes since we first met

*Oh gentle my love*  
*gentle my love*  
*gentle my love*

There is something distinctly otherworldly about your presence  
You are not of this place  
You are a bright eyed fairytale  
Our love is an adventure  
Our love is physical  
There is not one part of your body I have not explored  
There is not one part of my body that is not yours  
We'll keep each other safe  
You have born us three cherub children who'll continue to write our  
love story for us  
They will do it in their own way  
Our love does not grow old and tired, our love does not grow up  
Our love grows to be together  
Our love grows to be forever

*Oh gentle my love*  
*gentle my love*  
*gentle my love*

**Go straight into next poem**

## Have I ever told you this

I love you so hard it hurts to miss  
I love you so much that when we kiss I hear nothing  
Not the kids  
Not the dog  
Not the cars on the humming road outside  
Not the nagging feeling there is something I should be doing and have not done  
When I'm with you I see everything  
Bathed in your light it's glorious  
Twelve years and I'm still not blind  
Even though I've felt dark inside  
Have I ever told you this

Have I ever told you im going to build us a nest  
In the tops of the tallest trees where the Crows crow  
That's where we'll build our nest  
Where the warm morning sun first melts the sugar dusted frost  
Sieved from stars through the open evening sky  
That's where we'll build our nest  
From threads of innocence we've tried so hard not to break  
From hair clips that have slipped between the boards  
From the receipts for gifts that we gave that we don't need up here  
From the torn pages of magazines we won't read up here  
From bits of string I keep under the kitchen sink  
From the dried up old tobacco we keep in the third drawer down that we're never going to smoke but it's there just in case of a really shitty day.  
From unfinished poems  
From broken guitar strings  
From the sticks we throw for the dog  
I'll take a red ribbon from our daughters hair and tie it around  
We'll hold hands and watch the madness on the ground Like we're the only birds ever to nest this tree  
We'll forget all about the love birds we used to be  
And just love being birds in the top of the tallest tree

**Link: Wedding chat**

**Wedding dance – Whitney Houston – how do I know**

**Link: pet dog as practice**

**Having a baby not having a clue**

## **It's arrived**

The day you were born was the best day of my life

It was only the first of yours yet It eclipsed all those that had come before

My achievements to date fell away onto the maternity ward floor

Your first cry watered parts of my eyes that had been dry for some time

Your first breathe coloured pictures in my childlike mind that had turned grey

In the Days that followed

I regressed to crawling on the floor making noises to noses and laughing at the dog with you

I learnt to walk again holding your hands

We learnt to talk, I learnt words I'd not heard for some time like please and thank you

We're learning to read, reading stories that first time around kept me awake with excitement

Now I am in your story Every day and I'm alive with excitement

We're learning to swim

Ever since you fell down the well at the old house

I uncovered it when I was building the decking outside

Its about so wide and twelve feet deep

I told you not to go near but you have an inquisitive mind and a selective ear

and in you fell

My heart stopped, but my legs sprang from the spot just in time to catch

Absolutely nothing

The terrifyingly calm surface of water had Swallowed you whole in one gulp

Gone

Without thinking as quick as a blink I dived in, head first  
Hoping that what I found beneath the water was the miracle of you  
I reached out for a fistful of wet hope  
I caught a fist full of wet clothes  
And clawed us up the walls of our under water coffin  
Pushing you above the water into the air, gasping for breath  
That was the worst turned moment of my life

But you were safe  
I realised then I'd die for you  
We'll laugh about it on your wedding day  
So that's why we're learning to swim

We're learning to ride your bike just like I learned to ride mine  
Its too big for you I know, but its the way you ride it  
Your feet can hardly touch the floor and your fingers barley reach the  
brakes  
But We can't stop now anyway you're six and growing too fast  
and ive still got so much to learn from you  
I just hope I can keep up.

## **After a fall**

I'll kiss your bruised and bloody knees  
Pick grit like shot from your reddening palms  
Currant studded plump young hands  
Sticky with life's jam  
I'll hold you tight in my arms and whisper 'everything's going to be ok'  
And 'I did tell you to tie your shoe lace'  
A cruel lesson to learn at the turn of five  
You nod and sob and nod and sob through clouded eyes

Blood runs down your leg and soaks your sock  
Your skin forms scars  
Sharp white shards as clean as glass  
Life's splinters that cannot be pulled  
A reminder we should learn from every fall  
I will never stop you from falling my princess  
But I will always be there to pick you up

## Son of mine

*Your golden hair floats above your head like a halo halo like a halo halo  
Your golden hair floats above your head like a halo halo like a halo halo*

You rise and fall on the trampoline arms and legs spread everywhere  
With the bounding energy of a lion cub curiously becoming accustomed  
to your young limbs  
Every jump Lands on my chest,  
You have the power to take my breath  
You have a laugh that brings me joy  
Needs that makes me selfless  
And a weakness still that makes me strong  
Thank you my son for needing me as much as I need you.

*Your golden hair floats above your head like a halo halo like a halo halo  
Your golden hair floats above your head like a halo halo like a halo halo*

Its just a scratch, its just a bloody knee, its just a tear in your trousers, its  
just you being me  
You wipe away tears and snot with your sleeve and keep on jumping.  
Looking at you, I see me, and smile at the only reflection I can bear to  
look at.

### 3<sup>RD</sup> Time Lucky

Today I heard your heart beat, beat, beat for the very first time  
18 weeks and counting that's 24 weeks 'til you're mine  
24 weeks 'til I can hold you  
24 weeks 'til I cry  
24 weeks 'til I fall in love again for the very first time  
I'll wait patiently my son to see the world through your eyes

*Today I heard your heart beat, beat for the very first time  
18 weeks and counting that's 24 weeks 'til your mine*

I'll probably never tell you how I broke down  
Didn't think I had enough love to give  
A heart full of head matter  
Dead matter bills, to-do lists, tangled responsibilities that tied my shoes  
together so I could not run alongside your arrival waving swaddling  
flags  
I could not celebrate my own breath let alone yours  
I had no salt joy tears to wet your lips to feed our bond  
I could not bless your eyes with father's smiles  
Selfish father

I could beat myself up forever and hope you never read this  
But we have come along way  
You are more than the black and white scanned web of wallet creases  
A set of limbs that wrap compression to tightened chest keeping pulse  
A laugh to pitch light into pitch dark  
Tiresias the truth teller, you came here to teach me all you know

**Link: Family story naming children**

**We have become a gang**

**Dance - air guitar - AC/DC Shook Me All Night Long**

**Link: Family life and adventures – fresh perspective – something  
new everyday – give a little get a lot.**

**Play virtual hide and seek – audience has to guess where I am hid-  
ing. A game we play in the car**



## **I'll Follow you now**

*You can direct our directions from your station on my shoulders*  
Pointing little fingers down unfamiliar streets  
Paved with the promises of adventures  
We'll stop and stand and stare into bakery windows and eat sweet fruit  
cinnamon treats  
We'll sip soft drinks sat outside café bars and laugh at their unpro-  
nounceable sensations  
But oh how we'll miss their strange bitter tastes when were home  
When were home, in the memory foam, story bubbles will dance discos  
on our tongue  
And pop on every tale we tell for years to come  
These are our adventures

*You can direct our directions form your station on my shoulders*  
Je parle un peu francais mais its never enough  
We'll learn words in Dutch that are only really useful in service stations  
outside Eindhoven  
We'll learn to count to five in German  
Anything more will have to be said with two hands  
There is no Danish word for please, But there are many thank yous we  
have to give  
You talk without talking and make new friends through just playing  
Your first language is fun, you are fluent and I have so much to learn  
We'll eat French fries on late night ferries  
We'll drive though the dark crossing borders without knowing  
We'll skate through pristine parks  
And skim over fjords using islands as stepping stones  
Dipping our toes in the warm waters of the Baltic  
Landing On beaches you'd never believe were Swedish.  
These foreign roads will become home for two weeks every year  
You can direct our directions from your station on my shoulders  
And we will take more wrong turns to places we never knew we wanted  
to be  
I will follow you now.

**Link: physically demanding, tidying the house for a work**

## Family work out

I've been developing a family friendly fitness regime  
That doesn't need a monthly gym membership  
It just requires me to commit a lifetime to my kids  
Which is fine  
Somehow this has been easier to achieve over the last ten years than  
dragging myself to a gym three times a week

I'll not get disheartened  
I begin with the cardiovascular – that's heart and lungs  
Starts with me running after three little ones in different directions, at  
the same time  
Impossible  
Impossible not  
Nothing is impossible if you are a dad or mum  
We are given superpowers at the birth and we are not afraid to use them  
My speed of the mark is now faster than when I thought I was in my  
prime  
And my ability to turn on the spot is lightening quick  
At the flick of a scream I am there  
To catch a fall  
I am a safety net  
I am a bike stabilizer  
I am a piggy back carrier for injured riders  
I give great piggy backs  
Does anyone want a piggy back?

**(Member of the audience comes up to have a piggy back)**

I am a cartwheel turner and somersault flipper  
**Faster dad - (audience)**  
I am a hand stand ankle holder  
**Faster dad**  
I am a climbing boulder  
**Faster dad**  
I am a tightrope walking hand holder  
**Faster dad**

I am a pram pushing bobsleigh driver

**Faster dad**

I am an offshore diving board and the life guard

**Faster dad**

I am all of these apparatus and more, my equipment status is worn but not bad condition given the age and abuse received through use you see, this dad position is pretty hard work

But I love it

**Faster dad**

But I've got to be careful though, my knees are cracked and my back is cracked and on cracked days my heads tap tap

**Faster dad**

I carry the weight of this family on my shoulders, I'm not Atlas carrying his boulder, these guys are my life line, my energy banks, my oxygen tanks

**Faster dad**

And one day I know my legs will buckle and we'll fall on the floor in one big cuddle and we'll chucke about the fun we had and my daughter and sons will know that; now, I am their work out

And that'll make me laugh

Thanks dad

**(audience member leaves the stage)**

**(continue)**

I Take care of the muscle tone and core

Every night I stand at the playroom door and surveying the carnage

It looks like I have interrupted a burglary by a marauding gang of six year olds hell bent on turning the place over looking for plastic dinosaurs, loombands, flipping loom bands, Pokemon cards, building blocks and toy cars.

I get down in to the plank position, which is kind of like a press up and I crab myself across the rug

**(get down on the floor)**

I brace myself with one arm whilst picking up toys with the other and launching them towards the toy box, they hit the open lid and drop in  
Win

I repeat his for a rep of ten then swap arms.

When I get into the middle of the room I get into the sit-up position

When I'm down, I pick up, when I sit up, I throw down  
Hit the lid and in  
Win  
I do this for 5 reps of ten and the floor is clear.  
For now  
But this family work out  
Is never over.

## **Upstairs Downstairs**

Ad-lib the scene, mimic shouting upstairs to kids in the morning, using mic for muffled sound of kids replies. Kids stuck under bed, think it's the weekend, can't find shoes, no P.E kit etc etc

**Link: My own parents – up bringing – looking back – own mortality**  
**Bring it to a close**

## Hands of a god

A giant and gentle man  
With giant and gentle hands  
Great big spade like farmer's hands that raise the land  
Embalmed in soil and grease  
These hands have nurtured new life and dealt swift deaths  
But they have not lost their sensitive touch though their leather skin  
tough gloves,  
Tough love  
These giant and gentle hands belong to a simple man  
Who has unconditionally loved this son  
Never tried to understand  
Never tried to complicate our father and son relationship  
Just an unspoken acceptance for who I am  
He has told me everything he needs me to know  
Through the warm embrace of his farmers arms

## Last words

*When I go I'll leave quietly  
Won't slam the door, I'll post the key  
I won't live here any more  
No I won't live here any more*

When I depart this world I'll leave no trace  
Except for my three children who are here to take my place and make  
their own shapes shaking the dust  
When I go do not confuse the mess of possessions I leave behind for  
anything more than flotsam that has drifted into the corners of a dead  
man's house  
It is useless  
Everything I have ever made has been a failure, every piece of art work,  
every poem written,  
Burn them, make me a fire, build me funeral pyre  
Do not build totems from my bones or dream catchers to catch my  
ghosts  
I'll have none of it.

*When I go I'll leave quietly  
Won't slam the door, I'll post the key  
I won't live here any more  
No I won't live here any more*

The future needs its own space to breathe  
Needs room to find its own words  
It does not need mine  
They were written to mark a moment in time and anyways  
I wrote them for myself and I'm taking them with me  
When I go, I will not leave a poetic epitaph to be cast in stone  
I am more likely to leave you questions on your answer phone  
Questions to which I will probably never hear the answers  
But this is my parting gift to you  
So seek your truth carefully  
Seek adventure  
Seek fun

And in time allow yourself to smile at yourself  
Stand proud with yourself that you did this all by yourself  
Without the need for dead power  
Dead influence  
Dead politics or dead money  
Your future is bright  
Look forward to it  
Step into its light.

**Thank audience for coming and joining the family**

**Last dance out: KC and the sunshine band - Give It Up**



4. Wise Words festival, 2017. Film to showcase the festival programme



## Emrys Plant Family Matter

BOOK NOW

SHOWING TIMES:  
Sat 26 Aug - 15:15pm to 16:00pm  
Sun 27 Aug - 15:15pm to 16:00pm

TICKETS:  
£4

AGES:  
Recommended for ages All ages

DURATION:  
45 minutes

VENUE:  
bOing! Yurt

### Emrys Plant present Family Matter

Emrys Plant explores the matter of family life, the unshrinkable mass that takes up space in our heads and hearts. An unqualified father and husband without a handbook making it up as he goes along with only love to give.

From the love that got us here, that carried us through the arrival of children and the heart stopping moment of losing them down a well... We've all lost a kid down a well, right? The love that picks up toys from the floor every single night whilst stepping on lego bricks without swearing.  
The Love that pulls us back from the edge and keeps us smiling.

Expect to become part of the family, to laugh, cry and dad dance in the kitchen together, through the ups and downs of family life.

## 5. Boing festival, 2017.

The Family matter show was booked by the Boing festival for its end of summer programme after the debut show was seen by the festival's producer.



**Geoffrey Wilcox** I was at your 3.15 show at Boing today. Sadly we had to leave before the end- my 4 year old daughter wanted some air then saw her friend and that was that so missed the last 15 minutes.

Genuinely gutted- have been to BOing every year since it started and your show was without doubt the best and most reasonably performance I have been to.

I spoke to your sister in law outside and she said you were on YouTube- help me out and tell if there is a video of the full Family matters show out there? Great stuff and I did spend most of ( the 40 minutes I did see) nodding and going yep, yep, he knows

Like · Reply · August 26 at 9:50pm

## 6. Boing festival, 2017.

An audience member sent positive feedback after seeing the show.



## Critical reflection of practice

The creative purity of writing this show was achieved through an insular process, working following very personal lines of inquiry and inspiration. In these moments, I was able to put to one side the pragmatic pressures of other work projects, the demands of maintaining a plural practice and be fully immersed in the *Family Matter*.

Working autonomously with what felt like purely creative, non-commercial intentions was enormously freeing. A chance to isolate original creative endeavour as a condition of creative practice. This, more simple pathway through the creative process was by no means siloed, creatively influenced along the way by observations and the writing and performances of others. ‘Nothing comes from nowhere. All creative work builds on what came before. Nothing is completely original’ (Kleon, 2012, p.7). I have been fortunate to perform at events with the poets Kate Tempest and Hollie McNish, their confident, yet often gentle performance style really engages audiences who find common ground in their words. This sense of relatability is something I try to build in my own performances. McNish in particular also has an autobiographical leaning in her work that tackles parenthood and has been particularly influential.

The essence of creativity and the anguished *artist* is held in romantic vision, a vision that some believe is very much confined to the past, the future is collaborative (Poggenpohl, 2004). However here the intensity in which I could focus creatively came only through working alone. Very different methods of creative process are of course employable, the artist Bill Drummond (1988), lays bare the formula for musical success in his book *The Manual* (how to have a number one the easy way) cynically stripping creativity away to leave a set of instructions of manufacture. The book itself *is* the art, the instructions *are* the engagement, itself a form of brutal poetry.

The challenge for a creative practitioner who works alone is often finding self-motivation. Overcoming a lack of direction and a liability to states of catatonic inertia are challenges made harder by swelling insecurities and indecision. *Family Matter* was a creative challenge for me that I tackled alone, I was interested to interview single practice creatives to whose personal practice also involves working on performance based outcomes.



7. Laura McCafferty, 2016. *The emergence of character two from a circus of disappearance.*

Laura McCafferty is a practicing contemporary artist, she is also a lecturer in Fine Art at Nottingham Trent University. I am interested in how she views creativity in her practice and how she balances this with outside work, a reflection of my own role as a lecturer. She teaches to fund a practice that to her can remain ‘pure’, un-muddied by commercial constraints, it is clear she prioritises creative control over commercial success:

As a tutor, I tutor as an artist, when I’m speaking to a student I speak to them as if I am in their work...I couldn’t be a tutor if I wasn’t an artist but I could be an artist if I wasn’t a tutor... Its takes the commercial pressure off my art work because I put myself out there as a practitioner I get paid for my understanding of what it means. I’m not focussing on the commercial value or not have the commercial strategy and I can write about it and think about it (McCafferty, 2017).

There is a balance to strike. Laura is reacting to a self-enforced change in her creative practice, deciding five years ago to move away from her former commercial based work to a more contemporary performance based output. This change in direction has had the biggest

impact on how she sees her creativity: ‘When I was making work to sell I was stagnating and I wanted the whole thing to be moving... I wanted the practice to shift and the work to shift and that became literal, people moved the work... I wanted people to see it not as a consumer’ (McCafferty, 2017).

There is an acceptance of time in McCafferty’s creative practice, interestingly time is less of a pressure and more of a tool, an invitation for time to control the pace of output. Laura’s more singular practice stands in contrast to that of a plural practitioner, providing useful counterpoint to assess the nature of the challenges and pressures she works under. There is an acknowledgment that fighting time is futile, her sewing process has a pace that cannot be quickened, allowing her time to think and for internal voices to shape the work.

Making these objects, that take a long time to make, that gives me time to think what I’m going to do with the object. Through making the object leads to the script and what will happen with the object, what characters will evolve from its making ...sewing ...slows you down, like a van has a speedometer capped at 50 mph, the sewing, the making of the object does that, I can only go so fast (McCafferty, 2017).

Laura’s focus on more conceptual creative outcomes throws a contrasting light on her archive of previous works. Images of her past commercial pieces shared and re-shared online, still exist in published articles and remain out of her control. This old work comes from a different place philosophically, the situation asks interesting questions over the management of creative development and identity and past work. For Laura, far from affecting her credibility in her new chosen direction, her older, commercially successful work serves as a platform. There are strong links to materiality and high production values that suggest a relationship going forward. It is an interesting side note that while we work on our creative present and future, there is now more than ever an unbreakable link to our creative past. The growing ability of new technologies to archive our professional and personal history removes the control of our creative legacy. The control is placed in the hands of the documentor, audience and reviewer, whose comments will live on publically long after the work has disappeared.

Working alone on spoken word performance and the *Family Matter* project is an exception in the general pattern of my creative process. I often produce work in collaboration, either with co-creators, client/influencers or commissioners and audiences/users. Dialogues open-up when working with a third party and become influential in decision making; this can be a positive force for creative thinking. There is a need for objective thinking to consider the holistic needs of all the creative stakeholders. To keep full creative integrity at these times can be difficult, compromise waits at every turn. Far from being a detraction from the 'success' of the work, an artist or designer's skills are appreciated and valued as part of the team effort to meet the 'brief'.

Plural creative partnerships can achieve 'rich coupling', purposeful, designed collaborations are effective, borrowed social design theory identifies the need to allow for 'coordination of multiple actions to achieve a common goal' (Behymer and Flach, 2016), suggesting that only through effective collaborations will the designed solutions for tomorrow's problems appear. The creative industries have begun to celebrate not just industry collaborations but interdisciplinary partnerships that evolve the creative processes, 'creativity is the incredible universal energy that human beings possess to change things ..... creativity has been redefined over the last few years. Everything has changed, become more complex and more woven together' (Bambach quoted in Ewin et al, 2014, p.16). These complexities and weaving together of creative processes are just what makes plural practice relevant going forward.

During this research period I was commissioned by the Wallace Collection London, to write and perform a spoken word piece in response to their forthcoming *Gilded Interiors* show. The Wallace is a centrally funded gallery showcasing a national collection of historical paintings, interiors and furniture mainly from the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Creatively I was challenged by my lack of knowledge of 18<sup>th</sup> century history and the techniques of how these artefacts were made, but importantly I was able to find their stories. In contrast to the free writing of *Family Matter*, I struggled with writing about the inanimate objects from the Wallace Collection that evoked such little emotional response, however the enthusiasm of the collection curators and staff soon brought the objects to life. They became mirrors that reflected a socially exciting time in history, with strong links to our own present socio-



8. Emrys Plant, 2017. *Flickering candles*. Commissioned by the Wallace Collection as a promotional film for the ‘Gilded Interiors’ show at the gallery.

political situation. Through direction and editing and working with a knowledgeable team, a story could be told that could capture audience’s imaginations. The performance was filmed in the galleries at night by Khaki Films production company. The film delivers poetic content used to market the new show at the Wallace Collection. It was produced on time and on budget and in doing so I believe it met the expectations of the client.

The experience with the Wallace Collection reaffirmed the importance of curiosity as a creative practitioner. Author Ian Leslie (2017) talks with *University challenge* champions Monkman and Seagull about curiosity as a heady mix of ‘intellect, emotion and drive’, he identifies epistemic curiosity as the desire to not just find answers but to find new questions. These are shared influences in creativity, especially where challenges appear to block creative progression, curiosity will find ways to move the creative process forward and encourage diversity in practice.

There were differences in the creative approach to writing *Family Matter* and the Wallace Collection pieces, both poetic outputs formed

form different creative influences but both find narrative and drama in observations of the everyday. As a plural creative I am concerned that there are differences in my practice that appear confusing. Laura McCafferty identified in her archive disparate work that may lead to a confusing legacy and a diluted reputation. In turn perhaps causing a devaluation of worth, a recognised concern in the human condition: ‘who has not for the sake of his reputation sacrificed himself’ (Nietzsche, 1973, aphorism no.92).

It is clear that even the simplified creative process of writing poetry is influenced by conditions that are not fixed, they shift and become influenced at times by different forces.

## Family

The *Family Matter* spoken word show was a construct of observations and experiences of fatherhood and family life, without which much of my poetry could not be written. The linkage between the creative output and family is linear here and shows a clear shared energy.

In a traditional sense my working practice fills the position as the family’s ‘breadwinner’, meeting the greater part of the family’s monetary needs. As our family has grown there is a growing demand on both time and money, raising a conflict for us as in effect the more of one you have the less of the other you get.

A 2013 Pew Research center study on fathers found that compared to fathers from a generation ago we are spending triple the amount of time with our children as well as being the primary income earner (Behson, 2015)

My wife Heidi Plant is an artist and has a growing career that requires her energy and time, taking her away from our family that depends on her so much. We have three children and Heidi has managed the full responsibility of childcare while maintaining her art practice for the last 10 years. She has keenly felt the impact my plural practice has on our family:

Every time you’re not here I have to look after the children and



9. Heidi Plant, 2018. *Fountainbleu Forest*. Giclee print for Artstar gallery New York.

that I find really hard, i wish that somehow it could be equal  
I would love it to be equal, I just don't see how and it really  
bothers me.

I have this voice when I'm cooking the dinner that says why  
do I have to do this? Why is he not here doing this? and it's  
really hard and then I have another voice that says because he's  
earning the money, it gets me in turmoil.... a lot. I speak to  
my friends and were all in the same boat and how are women  
supposed to get anywhere as women are stuck as the main  
carers for the children and that comes with having to do most of  
the domestic jobs (Heidi Plant, 2017).

It is essential I understand the impact of not only my practice on our  
family but also the way in which our family impacts Heidi's work as an  
artist. If I can understand her position we can better shape our work/life  
balance:

It's good to play and we'll make something out of playdoh and I think that's interesting and I'll use it in my work later.....  
We'll be painting outside and I'll love the way Flo has painted a girl and I'll take a picture and later try and paint in that carefree style.  
Every time we have another child I create a lot more art work, I didn't even make art work before we had children, it really focussed me like nothing else (Heidi Plant, 2017).

It's clear that inspiration from family activities inspires Heidi in her work, much in the same way it has done for me, however there exists as much frustration for her as there does positive influence:

When your time is really pressured it makes you really focussed on the things that are really important to you. I either find any way to do it or I don't do it at all, because it gives me so much, not doing it is not an option but actually doing it is very very difficult at times... Sometimes I have no help with childcare and I can't bare to give it up so I make time wherever I can to make it possible.  
To do my art work has always felt very indulgent, It's a chance for me just to be me I can't do that when I'm looking after my children because they have to be number one (Heidi Plant, 2017).

My family see that I am too often pulled in too many directions by work commitments potentially created by the diversity of my practice. Commitment to work can also manifest in a lack of presence at home as my thoughts continue to solve work problems. The impact of this is that my family have to manage without me at home for support both domestically and emotionally. Heidi has strong feelings towards the predetermined gender norm, the female role she and other women fulfil as the default primary childcare provider and my role as the male financial provider. She is rightly concerned that this is an adhesion to previous generations of gender norms and we are not doing enough to use our positions as self-employed creatives to find an equal balance.

Emotionally we are both frustrated at how we have been unable to





9. Johan Bavman, 2016. *Swedish Dads*

break this cycle to create an equal family and work balance between us. An equal balance of responsibilities would give Heidi's practice time to grow to make a valuable financial contribution to the family. Maintaining the status quo because of our financial situation places us on a treadmill that is unable to stop and change direction.

Perhaps our domestic situation is a result of our cultural and societal position, however this can change. In Sweden couples are given 480 days parental subsidised leave when their child is born, the time can be equally shared between mothers and fathers. Johan Bävman photographs Swedish fathers and discovers the positive effect extended paternity leave has on their families, as it has done on his own. Many of his portrait subjects cite stronger bonds to their children, better understanding of parenting and even learning more about themselves. This model also redresses the gender balance when it comes to recognising the hard work that goes into childcare (Bävman cited in Edmonds, 2017).

*Family Matter* was a creative output from my practice that was less influenced by time pressures, finance and collaboration. It allowed for a concentration on creative development and highlighted the importance of enjoying an engaged practice with a concentration on the creative core of what is being produced. In reference to creativity, Laura McCafferty and Heidi Plant highlighted their need to have a practice unencumbered by the pressures of finance or other people.

As found in my own practice, there is a strong influence of family on Heidi's work, creative inspiration drawn directly from our children and family life, this coupled with the conflicting frustrations at not having the time to create more work or spend with family. There are much deeper social structures at play here, the generational eroding of gender norms and a changing policy shaped workplace. Bävman's project goes some way to offering a view of the experience of parenthood within a different western culture. The creativity of parenting itself is identified and is likened to a creative craft: 'We do not think of parenting, for instance, as a craft in the same sense that we think of plumbing or programming, even though becoming a good parent requires a high degree of learned skill' (Sennett, 2008, p.23).

Whilst recognising the important creative construct of parenting, it is frustrating that Sennett (2008) is also in danger of casually re-enforcing gender stereotypes, in his acknowledgements at the start of his book *The*

*Craftsman* he writes: ‘Finally, Saskia Sassen, Hilary Koob-Sassen and Rut Blee-Luxembourg made me the best gift a family can give a write: they left me alone to think, smoke and type’.

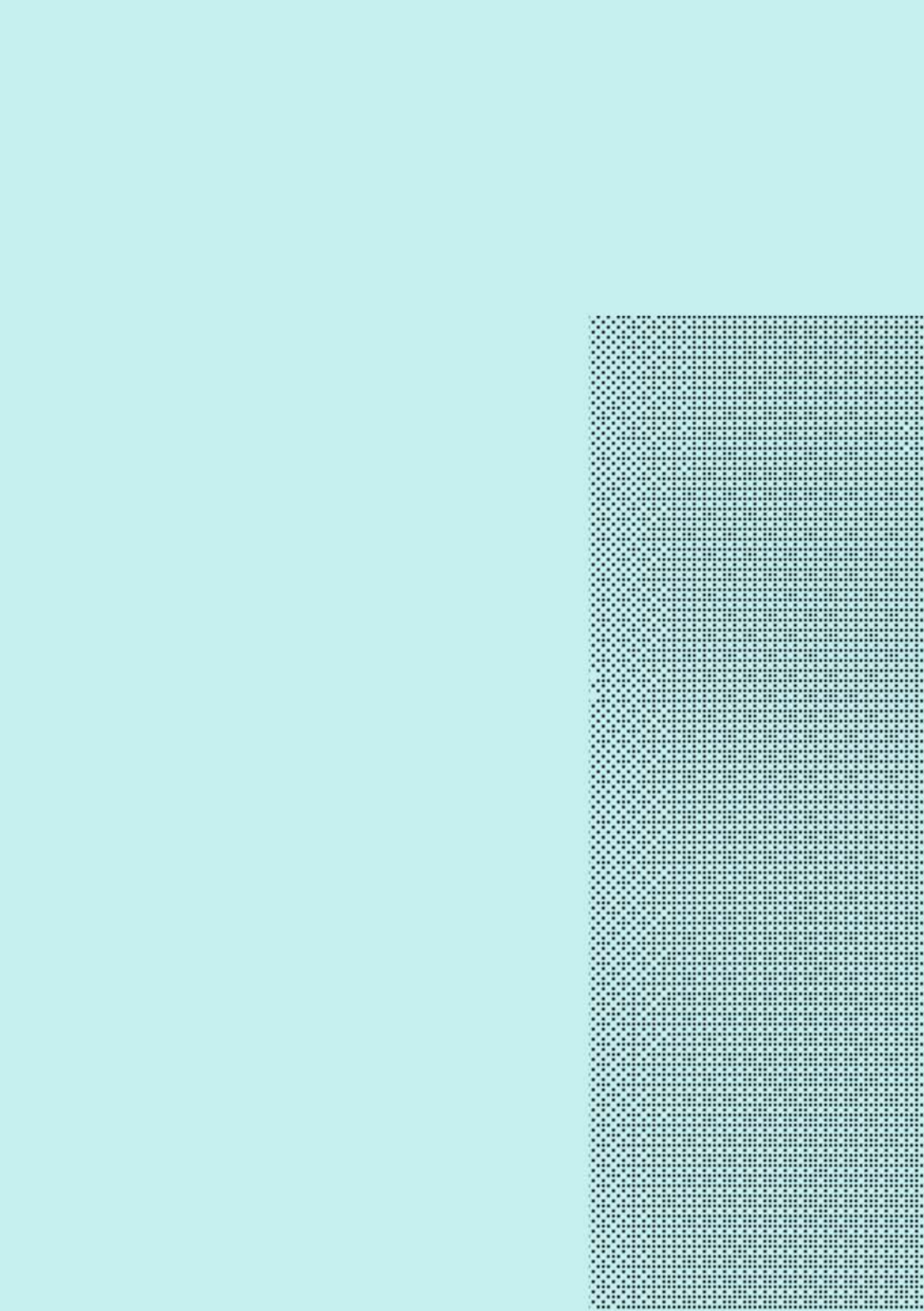
The poetry aspect of my practice has a creative focus that rarely exists in other areas of my practice, it provides the strong use of narrative between other projects and soulful nourishment. Spoken word performance does not pay me enough to make it a financially sustainable part of my earnings.

Better to be hungry and cold, but spiritually nourished, than to feast by a blazing hearth with spiritual emptiness gnawing away from inside (Korn, 2017, p.17).

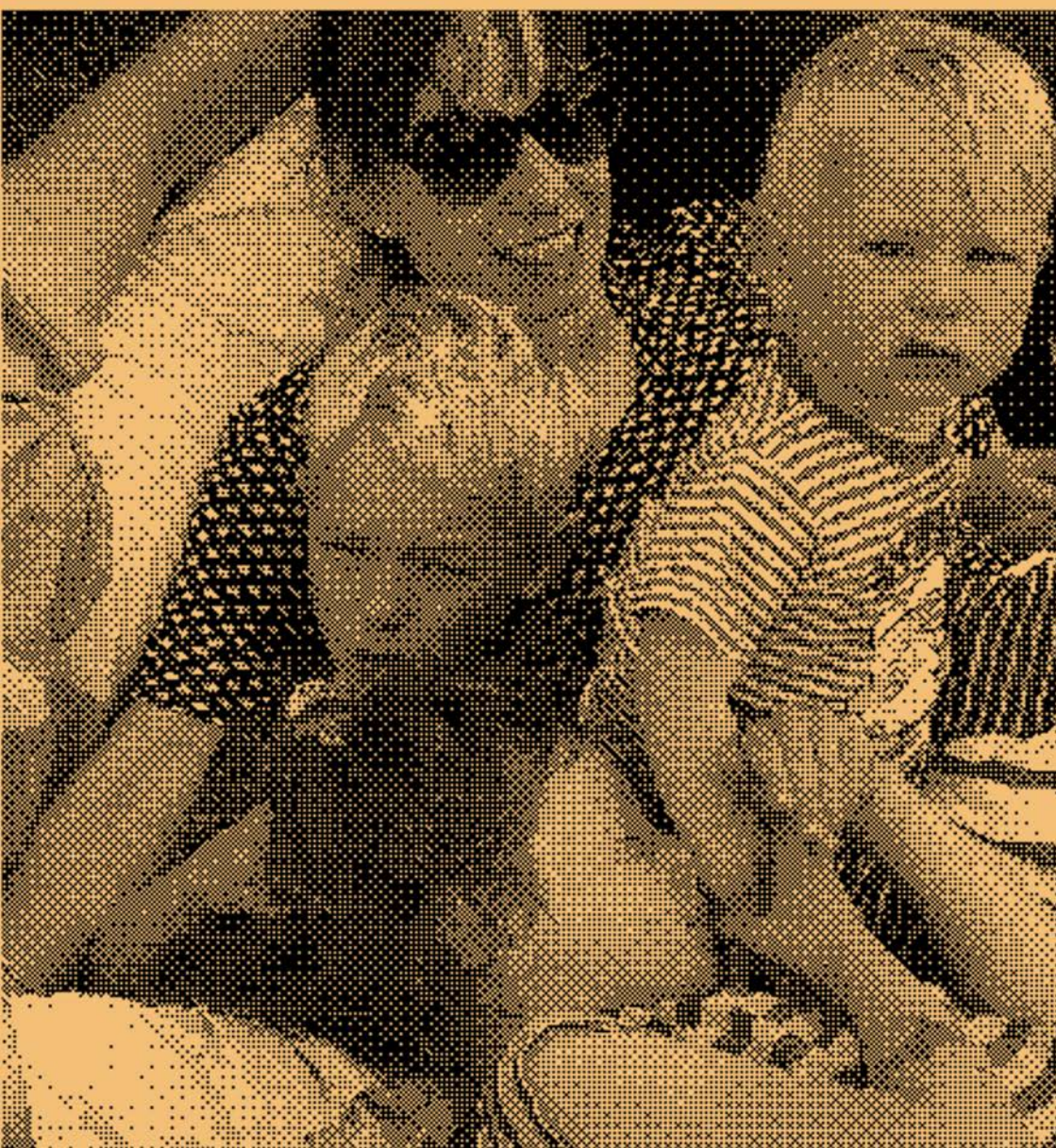
There is a lack of collaboration in making of this work that is on one hand its strength and in other ways makes it lonely and at times almost too self-reflective. The benefits of this connection to poetry pervade all aspects of my work, a plural practice is dynamic, sharing both knowledge and process between projects and an ability to deal with creative concepts and realise them through multiple outcomes.

Interviewee: Laura McCafferty  
Interview length 34:51

Interviewee: Heidi Plant  
Interview length 1:01:53  
Spoken word practice: Family Matter  
Location: Canterbury, London



# 5/ Conclusion & Bibliography



## Conclusion

Exploring the sustainability of plural creative practice and the conditions that influence it has been a substantial challenge. There are a breadth of practitioners in the creative industries whose working practices offer rich and broad processes to study, perhaps even mono-practitioners are not so linear on their creative pathway.

This research has found limitations in its subjective self-reflection, drawing heavily on practice that is from a single source. However, this necessary approach gave the practice based research sharp focus, each part of the practice offered a different process and outcome that originated from a common source, providing a necessary control from which to make observations.

Through this research I have begun to identify the conditions that influence not only working plural creative practice but more importantly the influences surrounding a holistic work/ life balance for a creative practitioner. I felt it necessary to identify family at the beginning of this research not as a condition that influences work, but importantly as the family-life lens through which this research has been conducted.

Macro-conditions exist that influence the foundations of plural creative practice, economic and political factors such as employment policies and tax systems. Government or organisational funding and support affect the practices of interviewees and the projects some practitioners are able to work on. Social and cultural conditions affected the way working practice is undertaken in relation to family and parenthood, challenging gender norms and addressing a mindful approach to work/life balance.

Micro-conditions are more nuanced and exert differing degrees of influence on personal practices. The levels of time needed to spend on work are personal to each practice, so too is the level of finance needed to sustain an individual practice and practitioner. Creativity in process, skills and ideas is at the core of a working creative practice. The extent to which creative fulfilment and creative integrity influence a practice are personal to the practitioner. Importantly, creativity provides purpose for many and is the reason 'why I do what I do'. Exploring creative outputs, however broad, through the paradigm of a creative practice is how I like to think of my work.

There is an element of connecting with people identified within plural practice, whether it be part of the creative process in collaboration

with partners, a community or sharing work as performance or exhibition. Working in creative collaboration requires close understanding and empathy with your collaborator(s). This research presented CROWTHER/PLANT and *Positive Protest* as projects that show there is great value in these creative relationships. At the same time they possess the potential to feel compromised in order to maintain a harmonious relationship and deliver the project requirements. There exists a tension in my practice to maintain full creative control, the independent writing of *Family Matter* avoided the compromise of creative cooperation. In relation to the research question I need to look at practice as a whole and recognise that the important influence of working with people brings depth and better understanding to my practice. This is not only recognised in the creative process but through the influence of commissioning, planning or feedback.

Each project I undertook during this masters research period stimulated a rich dialogue within my own plural practice and the context of where it sits as a creative and commercial undertaking. The development of this research has very much helped rationalise a seemingly disparate set of inputs into an understandable working structure. The structure can be illustrated by thinking of each part of my practice as a department within the same organisation. In order for the organisation to run smoothly and grow, each department needs to talk to each other, share ideas, organise calendars and budgets, cooperate with third parties (clients and suppliers) and collaborate with experts. I am the head of this micro-company, overseeing the work between all departments to keep continuity and balance.

Conversations and interviews with other practitioners have given insight into wider working systems employed by creative contemporaries, this helped build a picture of the wider creative sector. The depth of these interviews helped identify creative practice as a holistic involvement, rather than an exclusive career vs life experience.

Practice is complex, durational and very personal, shaped by personal decision making, experience and needs, it is easy to lose sight of goals but identifying the 'mountain' will help the journey towards it (Gaiman, 2012). Clear practice aims and a planned workflow offer structure in the creative journey. Interviewee Tom Adams has a long-term funding plan and is working with it to make him a sustainable practitioner. Laura McCafferty paces her work, allowing the process and the journey to dictate the outcome in her singular practice with

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long-term creative goals that offer a manageable pathway. Claire Orme is exploring plural practice like a plant root looking for water she finds new ways to thrive. As creative thinkers, all my interviewees felt bound to creative practice as a way of life: ‘I couldn’t do an office job, I’d rather eat tins of tomatoes every day’ (Orme, 2017).

Effective organisation of time can be identified as the first step to a sustainable plural creative practice. Time dominates the work/life balance as a definable tool of structure. Most importantly there is a need to be realistic about time, honest time management requires planning where time is spent and keeping to the time plan.

During the CROWTHER/PLANT project I really felt the effect of poor time planning and the need to balance time between work and family and financial reward. This case study highlighted not only how work and family life influence each other but also how the gender norms of family life are a challenge to change, even within a willing relationship and a changing socio-economic landscape. What is clear, is that work is an inseparable part of part of life, making it necessary to view working practice as just one part of a complete life.

Claire Orme’s freelance practice is seemingly dominated by financial juggling, the plurality of her practice influenced by the need to say yes to so many income streams. The position as a self-employed creative practitioner gave focus to the relationship of time vs money; the weight of research suggesting self-employment is more time hungry and less financially rewarding than being employed.

During our conversations, all interviewees cited money as a considerable influence on their practice. There appeared different approaches to finance from Tom Adam’s planned funding to Claire Orme’s scattergun employment and Laura McCafferty’s stable job to fund her arts practice. What is clear is that a financial plan is key to a sustainable practice, not only to develop working practice but also to financially provide for family. Money has traditionally been a strong influence on the need to work and still is. However, as societies develop, the need to work for money wanes and as discovered in the case studies and interviews, the need to work is now heavily influenced by creative fulfilment and work satisfaction. In book one I refer to Blyton (2013) who suggests that more people are working now for reasons other than money and would continue to do so even if they could afford not to.

A creative practice is keenly influenced by the need for creative fulfilment, at times over and above the need for payment. Creative

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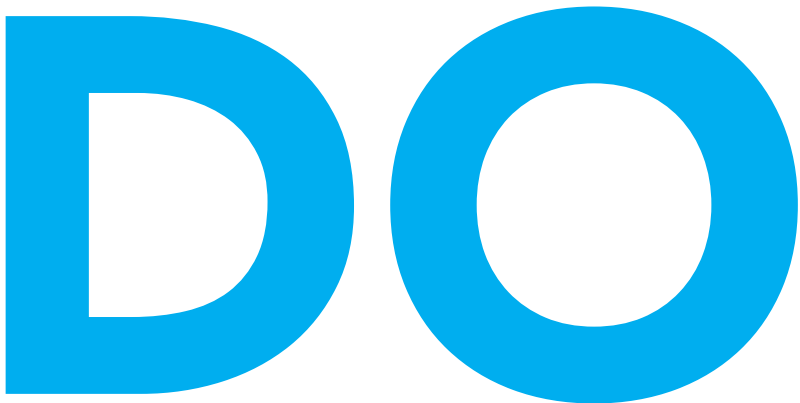
endeavour, original creation and curiosity are key reasons to work in the creative sector, it is unsustainable as a practitioner to be unfulfilled or stimulated.

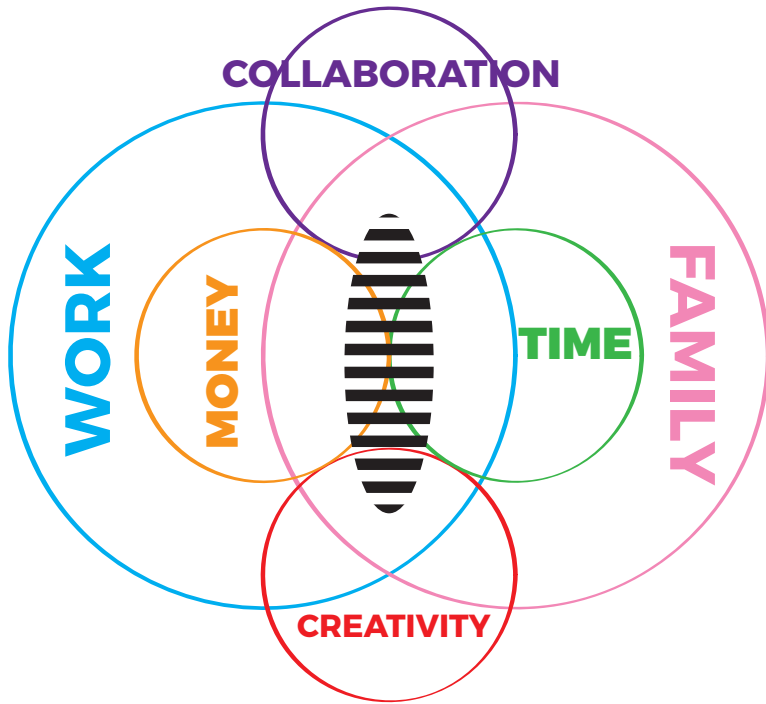
There is a strong two-way influence between work and family relationships on the creative process, both demanding time and money and providing a useful counterpoint to risk in decision making on both sides. Over and above this families can give a nourishing creative influence for some practitioners, fuel for creativity, a balance between the naïve curiosity of youth and the empathy and understanding of parenthood.

Plural creative practice is about doing, being involved makes things happen. I recognise I am happiest as a DIY-er. I feel a strong sense of DIY in my doing, and perhaps for me bigger does not equal more fulfilled or better.

I asked all my interviewees ‘So what do you do?’, through our conversations it became clear they all had practices that extended beyond just one job. For some there was a very broad selection, Claire Orme worked as an artist, curator, kids club co-ordinator, design assistant and archivist. For others a singular practice as an artist was coupled with the inseparable role of motherhood. For all, their curiosity into creativity was boundless and reached into every part of their lives.

A plural creative practice may be defined in part by the identification of autonomous processes and outcomes, however what is clear is that these outcomes are influenced by shared common conditions explored at the start of this section and identified through this research as:





### **sweet spot - work/life balance**

#### 1. Conditions that contribute towards a sustainable plural creative practice.

- Time and the work life balance
- Money, earnings and value
- Creativity: Integrity and fulfilment
- Collaboration and cooperation
- Family: Social and cultural context
- Work: Place and politics

These conditions may not of course be common or wield the same influence among all plural practitioners, each influencing condition can have positive and negative affects or even no affect at all.

I proposed that the influence of my family commitments was so strong it was not a condition of practice but moreover a lens through which my practice took place. Similarly other plural creative practitioners may have personal circumstances that influence their work, such as their gender or sexuality, race, religion, or disability. The artist Grayson Perry has a cross-dressing public persona that is part of who he is and what he makes. Stephen Wiltshire's detailed memory drawings are created primarily as a product of his autism, uniquely affecting him and his work. There are personal conditions that will affect all practitioners in unique ways that are not common to us all.

Throughout this study I have referred to 'honesty' and the need to be honest with myself regarding my expectations, abilities and communication with others. I have identified creative integrity as an influence on my practice and see that truthfulness with oneself should extend to all areas of practice in order to sustain balance and harmony. Although not a singular condition of plural creative practice this truth and self-awareness should pervade all areas; honesty in the time I have, the funds available or the likely satisfaction of the job. At planning stages of a project it is imperative there is a realistic expectation of what can be achieved within the framework of the influencing conditions. The research has highlighted to me the need to be honest with myself when assessing the impact of the influencing conditions on my practice.

As a central figure, the practitioner connects the dots between seemingly disparate pieces of knowledge to forge new and unique paths. The plural practitioner is well placed to follow a non-linear thought process that can combine skills, processes and areas of knowledge that perhaps don't traditionally belong together, creating new enriching solutions. In contrast, it is argued by Monkman and Seagull that the singular 'expert' fails to make these connections and in doing so forgoes an opportunity for creative originality.

Whether connections are via internal knowledge or external through collaboration, the ability to link ideas, people and processes is key to successful plural practice.

The plurality of practice in this sense is best thought of not as a linear set of simultaneous practices taking place alongside each other but much more as a mosaic of practice, a jigsaw connected by conceptual thoughts, shared skills and knowledge and common work/life conditions.

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## **Interviews**

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MaCafferty, L. (2017) Interviewed by Emrys Plant in Nottingham, 6th May 2017.

Orme, C. (2017) Interviewed by Emrys Plant in Margate, 28th April 2017.

Plant, H. (2017) Interviewed by Emrys Plant in Westgate-on-sea, 4th June 2017.

## Appendix 1: Image Sources

### 1/

1. Charlotte Player, 2016, Crowther/Plant look-book image
2. Emrys Plant, 2017, Margate Festival documentation
3. Emrys Plant, 2016, Family photo
4. Jason Evans, 2016, Resort members photograph, personal project

### 2/

- 1-8 Emrys Plant, 2016, Crowther/Plant design visualisation sketches, inspiration, and documentation.
- 9 & 10 Charlotte Player, 2016, Crowther/Plant look-book image
11. Emrys Plant, 2016, Crowther/Plant stand at London mens fashion week
12. British fashion council, 2017, website screen shots for documentation. [https://www.britishfashioncouncil.co.uk/business\\_support\\_recipients\\_lsr.aspx?seasonid=77&city=27](https://www.britishfashioncouncil.co.uk/business_support_recipients_lsr.aspx?seasonid=77&city=27)
13. Emrys Plant, 2017, London showrooms Paris marketing material documentation
14. Emrys Plant, 2017, product line sheets for Crowther/Plant AW'17

### 3/

1. Emrys Plant, 2014, Sticks and stones, <https://iamemrys.com/2014/10/10/sticks-and-stones/>
2. Bob and Roberta Smith, 2017, *Folkestone is an art school*. Images by Thierry Bal. <http://www.folkestonetriennial.org.uk/artist/bob-and-roberta-smith/>
3. Emrys Plant, 2017, Positive protest workshop webpage screen grab for documentation. <http://www.folkestonetriennial.org.uk>
- 4-7 Emrys Plant, 2017, positive protest workshop documentation.
8. Claire Orme, A Sirens Nocturne, image by Lena Cesar. <https://www.claireorme.com/a-siren-s-nocturne>

### 4/

1. Emrys Plant with Luke Jackson, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...>

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- 2&3 Emrys Plant, 2017, Margate festival commission
4. Wise Words festival film, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hIWFnBqsxwo>
5. Boing festival, 2017, screen grab for documentation, <https://boingfestival.com/archive/2017/>
6. Boing festival 2017, Facebook message feedback from audience member
7. Laura McCafferty, 2016. The emergence of character two from a circus of disappearance. <https://lauramccafferty.weebly.com/>
8. Emrys Plant, 2017, Flickering Candles. Film for Wallace Collection London. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_su9T7leX-Nc&index=3&list=PL7vjp6b-tzghQlh3AJPY6wq4Lmaw0ebP-g&t=25s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_su9T7leX-Nc&index=3&list=PL7vjp6b-tzghQlh3AJPY6wq4Lmaw0ebP-g&t=25s)
9. Heidi Plant, 2017, Fountainbleau Forest.
10. Johan Bayman, 2016, Swedish Dads. <http://www.johanbayman.se/swedish-dads/>

5/

1. Emrys Plant, 2017, Venn diagram - conditions of practice

