



**Qualitative Evaluation of the *Young at Art*
Programme 2019-2021**

**YOUNG
AT ART**

Final Report

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Executive Summary

Introduction and evaluation methodology

This report presents findings from an evaluative research study (conducted during 2019-2020) focused on the *Young at Art* Programme, which positions older people as active producers and decision makers in their own creative journey. Funded by Arts Council England and The Baring Foundation, with support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, it was commissioned by FACT and produced through partnership between FACT and Open Eye Gallery (OEG), and Happy Older People (HOP), via National Museums Liverpool. The Psychosocial Research Unit (PRU), based at the University of Central Lancashire, selected exemplar projects from each of the three strands of the programme: Digital Ambassadors (a FACT group which challenges the digital generational divide and therefore helps to address important issues such as community cohesion, digital inclusion, health and civic participation); Kirby Futures (an Open Eye Gallery's over 60's group within the Celebrating Age programme that has developed partnerships and collaborations with community groups across Kirkby); Happy Older People (a National Museums Liverpool network that promotes age-friendly arts participation - the only network of its kind in the North West). PRU developed a case study from each of these projects, incorporating a mixed-methods qualitative design: participant observation and qualitative data from in-depth focus groups and one-to-one interviews, combined with observation of cultural processes and events and analysis of documentary data.

Key features of the programme

The three case studies resulting from the evaluation showcase the range of ways in which the programme can achieve these aims. Main findings were:

- All the projects had older people engaged in creative arts-based activities. This varied from traditional art forms to cutting edge virtual reality video-making.
- The lead artists and key staff were skilled at assessing individual group member levels of ability and confidence in creative activities in order to be as inclusive as possible.
- There was a sense of community within groups, each of which brought together people of a broadly similar age and location with a shared interest. Across the groups, there were participants with age differences of over 30 years.
- All groups offered trips or external activities, from visiting galleries to filming on location in the Liverpool courts.
- For the Kirby Futures and Digital Ambassadors projects, there was an explicit focus on the development of skills and knowledge in art forms that require a degree of technical expertise (photography and XR (extended reality) film).
- The HOP and Digital Ambassadors projects had an explicitly intergenerational focus, with school children and youth club members respectively.

- Finally, all the groups were working towards a public display of artwork from their respective projects. Target audiences ranged from local to residents to exhibition visitors to the FACT gallery in central Liverpool.

Challenges and next steps

The main challenges in the various projects were:

- Ensuring that arts activities did not become too repetitive, or the groups focused narrowly on particular ideas and themes
- Keeping existing relationships between group members fresh when they entered into new collaborations with different artists
- Tackling access and travel difficulties for participant groups where physical mobility or geographical distance from city centre activities (at Open Eye Gallery or FACT) affected participation.

Young at Art's response to these challenges has been to inform planning with ongoing consultation with participants and community partners. This has helped them refine their role as an external cultural organisation and understand whether projects have come to their natural end, or there is an appetite to continue to work together. Although all the groups operate separately, there have been opportunities to network more widely in a series of *Young at Art* events in the region, enabling artists and participants to share experiences. In 2020, the pandemic impacted the programme and led to the postponement of planned sharing and network events. All face-to-face work was suspended and this had the potential to impact negatively on participants in several ways: many of the participants are otherwise socially isolated; many are in the designated vulnerable age group which means the virus poses a greater threat to their health; many have limited means to access platforms such as Teams or Zoom that would enable them to participate in online group activity, exacerbating digital exclusion. *Young at Art* considered how to adapt their programmes wherever possible. They continued to seek ways to address issues which have a detrimental effect on the region's older population such as the digital divide. This affords them an important role in the cultural ecology of the region.

Outcomes

- Engaging a wide demographic of older people - *Young at Art* has involved older people in high quality arts-based activities, spanning 30 years in age difference.
- Intergenerational interaction – some projects have involved younger people as an integral part of the work, successfully breaking down generational divisions to the benefit of all parties.
- Building a community of practice – The various *Young at Art* groups have brought together local people who have shared a passion for art and enjoyed collaborating to produce new art.

- Linking groups to cultural institutions and places – The *Young at Art* groups have linked participants with key cultural institutions in the city, extending access to audiences who may otherwise be culturally or physically excluded.
- Skills and confidence building across artforms – Participants have developed assurance in a range of artistic media from photography to complex/digital and hands-on/traditional work.
- Bridging the digital divide – Participants have gained experience and confidence in accessing technologies that are often assumed to exclude older people. They were able to develop a distinctive perspective on the ethics, modalities and impacts with the potential to influence other audiences, galleries and cultural sector workers.
- Validation of participants' artwork as high-quality art – the curation and presentation of the artwork in an art gallery afforded recognition of their achievements.

Introduction and background

The programme

Young at Art¹ is a Liverpool City Region-wide arts programme which positions older people as active producers and decision makers in their own creative journey. It has been funded for three years by Arts Council England and The Baring Foundation and with support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. It was commissioned by FACT and produced through partnership between FACT and Open Eye Gallery (OEG), and Happy Older People (HOP), via National Museums Liverpool.

The programme establishes a peer-led creative community for older adults, increasing the ambition of socially engaged arts commissions working with an over 60s population. *Young at Art* understands art as a space for social change and personal and social development. In this context, the programme aims to empower older people and encourage them to become involved in the city's art ecosystem, opening meaningful spaces for exchange and for participants to develop a sense of entitlement and enjoyment in the arts.

The main intended outcomes of this programme are to:

- Create a network of participants across arts and cultural organisations to build social opportunities in art organisations and the community
- Engage older adults in art and culture and create spaces for intergenerational learning
- Increase awareness and publicly disseminate learning from the programme.

Background

Liverpool has always had a strong cultural ecology for engaging creatively with older communities with shared learning and a collaborative approach between partners. There has been a focus on yearly events or conferences. *Young at Art* has enabled ongoing collaboration and sharing throughout their long-term partnership model with respected organisations FACT and NML. This will sustain longer term ambitions to enable creative agency with and for over 60s in the region. Digital Ambassadors has already been running for a decade. *Open Eye Gallery* has opened up opportunities for over 60s from the wider city region areas (such as Runcorn, Knowsley) to connect with groups within Liverpool and beyond - particularly through *Young at Art* joint celebration days, the HOP network events and opportunities to visit each other's live projects.

Programme staff

Lucía Arias is FACT's Learning Manager. Lucía has pioneered a number of innovative learning projects both in terms of engaging hard to reach audiences and supporting changes in teaching practice in public schools. She was Head of Learning Programmes at LABoral Art Centre, Spain, 2007- 2016. At FACT, she designs and manages both children and young

¹ This was initially known as **Art.Full**.

people and adult programmes, working with and within schools, prisons and in the community as well as developing innovative activities on site. She has also written academic papers for international conferences exploring The Transformative Potential of Making in Teacher Education. Her practice focuses on learning and engagement as an opportunity to collectively reflect around common areas of concern to participants and art as a space to challenge our understanding of the world and explore who we are.

Liz Wewiora is Open Eye Gallery's Head of Social Practice and leads the management of the Celebrating Age programme. Liz brings over 14 years of experience of working on socially engaged and community focused projects as both an artist and creative producer, previously leading the Over 60s programme at FACT before taking up her new role at Open Eye Gallery. She teaches on the MA in Socially Engaged Photography Course at University of Salford which included students having an opportunity to shadow the various Young at Art commissions. She has specialised in collaborative practice with older communities for the past 8 years and has an ongoing collaboration with Many Hands Craft Collective, (an Over 60s group in Ancoats, Manchester). For the Celebrating Age programme she manages the administration of the programme and supports the freelance cohort of artists to deliver projects with the various groups across the city region. She also manages the community partnerships involved across each project and continues to engage directly with participants to ensure positive long-term relationships with constituents once individual projects have been completed.

Jenny Watts is FACT's Learning Producer and the lead facilitator with the Digital Ambassadors. Jenny worked at Liverpool Biennial (2016 festival), Biennale of Sydney (2018 festival) and is co-founder of The Great British Music Camp, a not-for-profit arts organisation aimed at inspiring and supporting young people with musical projects. At FACT she is responsible for the planning and delivery of the adult strand of outreach work through the learning programme specifically with a group of over 60s and the work within two prisons in Liverpool.

Emma Riley was Marketing Officer at National Museums Liverpool. She worked on the flagship House of Memories dementia awareness programme and was the Happy Older People (HOP) network coordinator from 2017 until 2020. This included producing the HOP network meetings, monthly e-newsletters and the HOP Pots small grants scheme and chairing the HOP steering group meetings. Emma was a regular member of Liverpool's age-friendly cities steering group and represented the city during an age-friendly cities cultural exchange to The Netherlands in 2018. She produced the International Day of Older Persons event at the Museum of Liverpool in 2019. Emma also volunteers for Liverpool Cares, a charity which brings together a community network of older people and volunteers to share friendship and activity in Liverpool.

Rachel Mason is FACT's Learning Producer, leading on FACT's artistic programme within the Criminal Justice System and supporting the production of the young people's programme. In her artistic practice, she works collaboratively to create visual imagery, including photography and moving image. She has shown collaborative projects at Open

Eye Gallery and The Turnpike. Whether working on long term projects, facilitating workshops or creating spaces for people to connect, her projects revolve around establishing a dialogue. Rachel also has an interest in cross disciplinary approaches between art and science, especially around how the body works and adapts.

Dawn Carroll is House of Memories Relationship Programme Manager at National Museums Liverpool. She leads on the development and delivery of its engagement programme (partnerships, digital training and resources), as well as playing a strategic role in overseeing the Happy Older People network (HOP). Dawn has an interest in digital innovation for health, having played a key role in the creation of the 'My House of Memories app' and 'House of Memories On The Road', a mobile immersive experience for isolated elders in the community. Dawn has worked with an extensive range of partners, locally, nationally and internationally across the museum, health and social care sectors, and is a regional representative for the Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance.

Networking and events



Audience at the Happy Older People Network Meeting, Tate Gallery, Liverpool (March 2019)

The collaboration has hosted a series of sharing and dissemination events in Liverpool in the past few years. For example, the Happy Older People Network meeting (March 2019), which was held at the Tate Gallery, Liverpool. This was essentially a celebration of the HOP work to date, with presentations from artists and older people who participated in the various projects. The work was also endorsed in a presentation by local councillor Jeremy Wolfson, who is Liverpool City Council's Lead for Older People (South). A number of participants from

the HOP groups, including *Wheel Meet Again* (an over 50s group which covers a variety of activities, many arts based, with an emphasis on using transport to connect the group to each other and activities in the region) and the *Sefton Older People's Forum* gave short and enthusiastic presentations about how they personally had benefited from HOP projects. One of the key elements of this meeting – for which 59 older people came to the Tate, was a guided tour of the gallery.

The *Young at Art* Sharing Event (May 2019) was held at the Museum of Liverpool, which attracted 64 attendees. This incorporated all the different strands of the programme, and featured showcasing presentations from Open Eye Gallery, HOP and the FACT Digital Ambassadors, sharing their work from Part 1 of the programme (see specific case study for more information).



The Young at Art Sharing Event, Museum of Liverpool (May 2019)

Evaluation methodology

The Psychosocial Research Unit (PRU), based at the University of Central Lancashire, were commissioned by FACT, Liverpool to conduct an evaluation of the *Young at Art* programme. This evaluation forms the basis for this report. In consultation with key *Young at Art* personnel, PRU have selected exemplar projects from each of the three strands of the programme. PRU's study design developed three case studies, one from each of these projects, incorporating a mixed-methods qualitative approach: participant observation and qualitative data from in-depth focus groups and one-to-one interviews, combined with observation of cultural processes and events and analysis of documentary data (e.g. photographs of artwork resulting from the individual projects).

FACT: Digital Ambassadors

The Digital Ambassadors programme was motivated by a desire to challenge the digital generational divide and therefore help to address important issues such as community cohesion, digital inclusion, health and civic participation. FACT have attempted to make culture inclusive, by creating a shared space and providing an environment to exchange stories. Digital Ambassadors are generally over 60 years of age, but in order to connect the older adults with younger generations in the city so they feel less isolated, FACT works with adults of all ages. There are over 20 participants in the group and the gender composition is equal. They are predominantly white British.

The primary aim is to use art and creativity as a tool of conversation. Previous activities have included a visit to the Physics lab at the University of Liverpool (UoL). UoL Department of Physics sent videos to the group in order to engage them. FACT hoped to align the Digital Ambassadors with the 'STEAM' agenda (a combined approach of teaching science, technology, engineering, art and maths). There is therefore an intergenerational dimension to the work, as young people are also engaging with UoL in this fashion. The older people met with physicists from UoL and relished the opportunity to host a focus group discussion².

Further projects the group worked on included: the 'Future World of Work', another intergenerational project with younger children, entailing a visit to the Working Class Movement Library in Salford, and the opportunity to choose texts they found interesting and focus on Liverpool's shift to a 'city of culture'; 'Future Aleppo', which developed 3D models which were digitally scanned and are archived online and body swap, using Virtual Reality (VR) headsets. The common thread between these projects is that the artworks the group worked with are innovative and cutting edge in terms of incorporating new technology in the creative process.

Case study: Why can't we do this IRL? (2019)

Why can't we do this IRL? is an immersive 360-degree HD virtual reality film created by artist Megan Broadmeadow with an intergenerational group of participants, FACT's Digital Ambassadors and young people (14 to 18 years old) from three Liverpool youth projects: Team Oasis (a grassroots youth project in Dingle for young people often with learning or emotional needs), Toxteth Fire (a drop-in youth centre) and Tiber Youth (a youth panel). It examines the impact of new media technology on our understanding of the world and questions the responsibility of mass media towards justice. It was provoked by a YouTube gamer Shirrako posting online videos of his avatar from the game Red Dead Redemption 2. It featured the killing of a suffragette character demanding women's right to vote, in graphically violent ways. This created controversy among the viewers, some of whom objected to what they saw as glorification of violence against a female character. One of the comments read "*Rockstar [the developer], making dreams a reality, Why can't we do this in real life?*" This theme was proposed to the group by the *you feel me* exhibition curator, Helen Starr.

² <https://www.fact.co.uk/news/2019/01/does-time-travel-exist-and-will-solar-power-save-our-planet>

The project uses Extended Reality (XR) to explore ethical questions behind such gaming: should it be celebrated, treated as a real crime, or viewed as just a game? An art piece then placed the character that killed the suffragette on virtual trial to extend the discussion and further explore the ethical issues.



A still from the XR art installation *Why can't we do this IRL?* (© Megan Broadmeadow)

The work was displayed as an installation in Gallery 1 in FACT, Liverpool as part of the wider *you feel me_* exhibition - a collection of immersive artworks about power that invites the viewer into an alternative world, a place without division and a space where we can heal. Audiences could view and listen to the artwork on a large projected display or experience it through an individual XR headset, for a more immersive experience (the medium in which the artwork is intended to be viewed).

Intended outcomes

- To work intergenerationally in the local community
- To develop an artistic understanding of XR technologies, with an artist that brings performance and music to the use of the technology for an installation for FACT
- To thematically fit with the *you feel me_* exhibition at FACT
- To provoke a discussion on the ethics and morals in games and social media.

Data collection methods

The researchers interviewed the lead artist, attended the opening event at FACT, attended a seminar on the wider exhibition led by curator Helen Starr; conducted a focus group with participants and FACT key staff members involved with the project.

Commissioning process

This Digital Ambassadors project is commissioned by FACT as part of *Young at Art*, a partnership between FACT, Open Eye Gallery and National Museums Liverpool and funded by Arts Council England and The Baring Foundation and with support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. *Why can't we do this IRL?* was the first intergenerational commission as part of *Young at Art*. At the time, Helen Starr was FACT's Curator in Residence, and was curating *you feel me_* - an exhibition in collaboration with FACT. Helen and the learning team worked together developing the brief for the artist. They approached Megan Broadmeadow directly, based on a VR artwork she was exhibiting at Derby QUAD at the time.

Artistic process and model of engagement



Artist Megan Broadmeadow working with young people from Liverpool youth projects.

All of the Digital Ambassadors were already involved with the programme prior to embarking on this project. The entire process took four months from start to finish. After approximately a month's preparation, the FACT staff (Jenny Watts, Learning Producer, Neil Winterburn, Learning Technologist, Carlos Marfil, Learning Facilitator, Lucía Arias, Learning Manager and Ana Botella, Head of Programmes) and the lead artist began working with the young people at Team Oasis on a weekly basis. There were regularly between 6-12 people attending sessions and about 16 different children took part across the course of the project, with about eight 'core' group members. FACT mostly worked with young people from the film club at Team Oasis, who already had an interest in filmmaking. They worked with the young people and Digital Ambassadors separately at first and then brought them together prior to the production of the XR video. The Digital Ambassadors spoke fondly of this experience, both in terms of working with the young people and with the artist:

The young people were really lovely, we went to one of their youth panels...they kept making me laugh!

Megan was lovely, she was so down-to-earth and she always explained the processes to us.

I've enjoyed looking at the technical editing process.

The finished artwork features several of the Digital Ambassadors, both in video and audio form, but also appearing wearing masks at various points in the film. However, the artistic vision was shaped by Megan who was supported by a developer, working together as a team. Megan curated the work, leading on the presentation and the participants brought their ideas and experiences on themes. The production used a green screen for some scenes and participants had to pretend they were in a different scenario, with Megan adding layers of images to make it a XR experience. Despite the complexity, the XR video was developed rapidly.

Rather than take an explicitly political or polemical view of the issue, the artwork remained ambivalent, inviting the audience to form their own opinion on the ethical issues concerning violence against the suffragette character in the video game. The younger participants concluded that the artwork pointed at the viewer or the player as 'guilty', whereas for one of the older participants, it was harder to interpret:

I really liked the video, but I didn't feel there was any conclusion.

One possible reason for this is that the young people have more experience of the medium and of playing the game and easily respond affectively and spontaneously to the questions that the artwork poses. Some of the older group members didn't feel that it captured what went on in the process of making it:

Personally, I find it a bit disorientating...It bears virtually no relation to what happened in the in-between but, to my tastes it's a bit surreal. I suppose it's down to the individual.

The 'in-between bits' were explained as the workshops which took place and the ongoing discussion around the topic of ethics and morals in video gaming. One of the older participants commended that they were unaware that it was possible to commit these kinds of acts in video games:

I was... never really was concerned about it until Helen Starr...came into sessions, she talked to us about it.

The Digital Ambassadors enjoyed the discussions, in particular the intergenerational element and seeing how the young people interpreted concepts such as feminism:

We also saw how the young people were discussing it.

I liked all the discussion, everyone has different opinions.

The Digital Ambassadors also experienced a form of collaborative working with the composer who wrote the soundtrack for the piece, Liverpool Congolese artist Blue Saint.

He was really good, he took what we'd talked about and made it into rapping.

The experience of virtual reality went down well with the group. Some had experienced it before on an earlier project they worked on but for others it was a new experience.

I just think [the XR headset is] fantastic I love it, I want one myself!

Although one Digital Ambassador was so uncomfortable with XR that she wouldn't view the artwork through the headset, the consensus was that this was the medium in which it should be seen:

It's so much better in virtual reality than on the projected screen.

With regards to completing the work, the FACT project manager explained that they always knew the artwork was going to be presented in the exhibition, which created an incentive to drive the work forward:

We knew what was created had to be in the show. It made us want to create something excellent.

Use of FACT and other community spaces

The project involved filming at three different locations, at Toxteth TV, FACT headquarters, and most notably at the old law courts in St George's Hall. This made quite an impression on the Digital Ambassadors:

Going to St. Georges Court was my favourite part, getting an opportunity to see the inside. Using it as a 'film set', you could sit in the judge's seat and go into his private chambers.

We were there all day, quite a long day.

The intention was for young people from Team Oasis to visit FACT regularly to work in the Lab. Initially, some weren't comfortable with coming into the city centre. FACT then designed a plan to make them feel more comfortable, including a behind the scenes visit at FACT, including the gallery space.

Special events and interaction with the public

Why can't we do this IRL? was launched at FACT in December 2019. The video was presented as a 'flat screen' projection on a wall of the gallery. The presentation was unusual: It was introduced by Megan Broadmeadow, but rather than show the film in its entirety, it was paused at various convenient intervals and the artist, Digital Ambassadors and young people from the project were invited to comment on the preceding section. This served to

make the piece more accessible to the gallery audience who were unfamiliar with the process of making the artwork.

Members of the public were invited to vote on whether they considered the protagonist character 'guilty' or 'not guilty' via a ballot box in the foyer of FACT, so there was a lightly participatory element to the piece.

In January 2020, FACT hosted a seminar based on the *you feel me* exhibition, at which Helen and Megan presented. This was open to an audience of academics and local partner organisations.



A gallery visitor experiencing *Why Can't We Do This IRL?* using a VR headset

The exhibition ran for three months and the Digital Ambassadors enjoyed frequenting it to experience it alongside the rest of the audience.

I was there yesterday!

Some felt confident enough to assess it, both in its own right and in relation to the rest of the exhibition:

I don't know quite how it sits with the other pieces. It works on its own. It must be a totally different experience to us as someone who is walking in off the street.

Partnership

The key partnerships in this project were between FACT and the various youth groups in Liverpool, and in particular Team Oasis. Due to the multimedia nature of the arts output, links with a local musician were also developed in order to complete the artwork.

Outcomes

- Engaging older people in innovative artforms (XR)
- A sense of community within the group
- Trips to external filming locations for the group
- Digital skills development
- Intergenerational work between the group and young people from local youth clubs
- The forging of collaboration through a range of creative activities
- The use of art as a provocation, posing a philosophical question
- The production of a high-quality VR video and art installation in a high-profile exhibition

Legacy and sustainability

Lead artist Megan Broadmeadow was satisfied with both the arts outputs of the project and the process of working with a diverse set of participants:

This is a step up from what I've done before with VR, this is only the second VR film I've done, but it was more ambitious in terms of working with a community on this scale. I'm really pleased with it.

Megan described it as “amazing” to work with FACT and would like to do so again in the future, although there are no plans for this as present. The Digital Ambassadors group continues to meet on a weekly basis, although this has had to be online as a result of the COVID19 pandemic. The FACT key staff member discussed how they are trying to take learning from previous intergenerational projects to improve them:

We realised from previous intergenerational working that we only got the two groups together at a late stage, we wanted them to work together at an earlier stage of the process. That's what we tried to do here and what we were going to take forward into the next project as well.

Before the Coronavirus lockdown, the Digital Ambassadors had begun work on the research strand of 2020/21 intergenerational project, *What if...?* based upon the idea of non-human law and 'The Living Planet' (FACT's 2020/21 Programme theme), and the creation of a 'locative' computer game, which at the time of the focus group (January 2020) the group were already excited about:

We look forward to the next thing that's coming up!

This was originally intended to launch in September 2020 but was postponed. Since lockdown, activities and conversations have continued to take place online with the same youth projects and three Digital Ambassadors, ensuring continuity in relationships. Email communication was used twice weekly. Texts, poems and photographs created by the group were sent to Jack Tan, the project artist, for him to begin to familiarise himself with the group. Three of the Digital Ambassadors are the 'core focus group' who have weekly digital Zoom conversations with the artist. This core group act as a conduit between the wider Digital Ambassadors group and the artist, relaying communications back and forth.

Overall, the Digital Ambassadors group is very engaged, with full sessions consisting of a group of 12-13 people. The FACT key staff commenting:

It's a strong family atmosphere, we don't advertise for places, but [new] people are welcome.

Young at Art's attempts to engage the Digital Ambassadors with complex and contemporary technologies serves a very important function of mitigating the intergenerational digital divide. It is fair to say that some of the older participants struggled with a non-linear narrative and the level of interaction these type of games require, whereas the young people generally play video games and consume youtube and social media regularly. The project introduced older generations to the distinctive aesthetic and immersive experiences of VR and video-gaming and enables them to develop perspective and voice on the issues raised. The interactive and immersive experiences of these media can expand or alter perceptual repertoires of an older generation more attuned to 'spectator' technologies.

Open Eye Gallery: Kirkby Futures

Open Eye Gallery (OEG) produces exhibitions, long-term collaborative projects, publications, festivals, and university courses — locally and worldwide. 85,000 visitors attend the gallery every year, over 200,000 to projects in other venues, and many more to OEG's online spaces. OEG is taking a lead on socially engaged photography nationally. For several years, they have been bringing photographers and communities together and establishing projects where the collaborative process is just as important as the final product. Within this programme, they have been developing projects with a number of distinct Over 60s groups across the city region since 2016. Their current work within the Celebrating Age programme has allowed them to develop existing partnerships and collaborations with community groups across Kirkby and Runcorn whilst also working with new older communities in Clubmoor and Prescott.

We Are Kirkby brings together two distinct but interlinked collaborative projects by photographic artist Tony Mallon, filmmaker and visual anthropologist Jemma O'Brien: *Kirkby Futures* with members of the Northwood Community Centre Golden Years Group and *Music For The Brain* with service users and staff from Kirkby Resource Centre³. In terms of demographics, the participant age group is between 60-83 (for women) and all the men are in their 60s apart from one in his 40s. The participants are predominantly white British.

In the first year of operation, OEG worked on the theme of the redevelopment of Kirkby and how some of the older residents felt left out of consultation. Kirkby is in the process of a lengthy £43 million rejuvenation and OEG have often worked with local groups reflecting on these changes. They used an organised trip to the Museum of Liverpool as an inspiration for photographic and film-based works in Kirkby and Liverpool town centre and have organised other day trips in the region for participants and participated in events such as the Tate Exchange Takeover Day (November 2018). Collaborating with a filmmaker, the group re-enacted past memories and discussed issues such as promises made to the local community that didn't happen (e.g. a new stadium for Everton FC), using Kirkby market as a focal point. Tony Mallon also worked on a separate project with service users of the Kirkby Resource Centre on a project with individuals living with Dementia. The results of this work were presented at the Sharing Event (May 2019 – see **Networking and Events**) as well as both projects being exhibition at Kirkby Gallery and in the public realm (September 2019).

Case Study: We Are Kirkby

We Are Kirkby is a photography project which involves weekly photography sessions with a guest photographer and amateur local photographers. Sessions were held weekly at Kirkby Community Centre, one of many activities the group attended there. The two artists working on the project were photographic artist Tony Mallon and filmmaker Jemma O'Brien.

³ <https://digitintherib.viewbook.com/music-for-the-brain>

Intended outcomes

- To develop collaborative work between with local Kirkby residents and professional photographers/filmmakers
- To creating a greater sense of agency of (and discussion with) their local community and environment
- To display arts outputs publicly in the local community to encourage further discussion and debate with residents about the changes in their area.

Data collection methods

The researchers conducted a focus group with participants and the lead artist from the project and accessed the online documentary film collection resource.

Commissioning process

At the time *We Are Kirkby* was commissioned, Tony Mallon was already working with the group at Northwood Community Centre and the group specifically requested to work with Tony again on a new project. When he was commissioned for the original project back in 2016, this was through an open call and interview process.

Jemma O'Brien was a new artist for OEG and a new filmmaker to work with the Northwood Community Centre group. Because this was the first time Open Eye Gallery had worked with this medium on a socially engaged commission, they decided to internally nominate three filmmakers they thought would work well in this context and showed the work of the filmmakers to both Tony and the group, with Jemma O'Brien being the artist they felt most drawn to working with and gave the project a "new dynamic" (Liz Wewiora).

Artistic process and model of engagement

We Are Kirkby had the addition of new male members to the group, adding a different dynamic to the gender makeup of the group than the previous OEG project, in which the participants were all women. As the technologies being used were more accessible, the group were able to take on additional roles in terms of the practical photography and image making based on experience and levels of confidence some group members already possessed with photography. As with the Digital Ambassadors, group members were already involved with a variety of local creative and arts projects prior to taking part in *We Are Kirkby*, some were run by OEG (e.g *Winds of Change*) and word soon spread about a new photography project in the area.

I've been involved in Knowsley Archives, did quite a few projects with them. I just wanted to carry on what I was already doing anyway.

Artists Tony and Jemma were commissioned by Open Eye Gallery to work with the group in Kirkby. The group shared an interest in local history but varied greatly in terms of their experience of photography prior to embarking on the project.

I didn't have a clue about photography.

I used to take a lot of photographs, but I've discovered a lot of things though Tony.

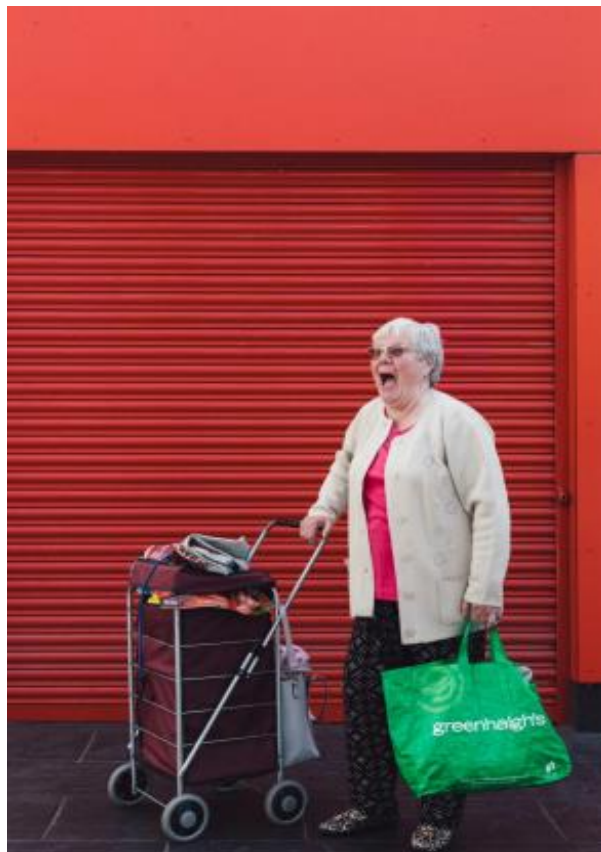


Photographer Tony Mallon with project participants in Kirkby market. (© John Wakefield)

One of the participants who was inexperienced in photography brought in a collection of valuable cameras she had at home (including a very old box camera), which enabled the group to touch on themes of history as well as learn about the technical aspects of photography.

The group developed a theme of a portrait exhibition of local Kirkby residents, using the Kirkby town centre and market area as their pop-up studio base. They offered to take shoppers' portraits for free and gave them complimentary copies to keep. In total, they took 170 portraits in Kirkby and at an earlier event at the Tate Exchange, in Liverpool. They did this over a number of weeks and Tony described the group as "becoming familiar faces in the space". Although they met with some resistance from people not wanting their picture taken at first, in general there was a lot of enthusiasm for the activity, as one participant commented:

I enjoyed...stopping people and taking portraits. They were very interesting people.



Kirkby Market Portrait 1 (@Tony Mallon and the Golden Years Group)

A local stall holder was of particular value, acting as a buffer for local shopper and encouraging people to have their portraits taken. Coupled with this activity, the group also went on organised days out, viewing different sites of interest in and around Kirkby.

The group co-curated the final works selected to try to ensure agency and co-authorship of

the programme. This was one of the most challenging aspects as there were so many individual viewpoints to factor in and a degree of consensus was required among the group regarding choice of images. They titled the exhibition *We are Kirkby*.

Tony acted principally as a guide to the group, working as a facilitator. Jemma, on the other hand, documented proceedings, and this resulted in some unexpected added outputs, including a short documentary about the group which was show⁴. This was showcased at Kirkby Gallery as part of the *We are Kirkby* exhibition. It was a cross site exhibition between Kirkby Gallery and an unused Shopping Unit, so people could visit both spaces. The Shopping Unit was taken over by the group every Friday morning, serving hot drinks and biscuits and inviting members of the public to continue discussions about Kirkby's high street redevelopment.

An earlier film made about two group members (Dolly and June⁵) was shown in a group exhibition in the Summer of 2019, called *Kinship* at Open Eye Gallery, as a stand-alone piece alongside international artists' works. The two films were then launched online in early 2020. This was an opportunity for both the group and artist Jemma's work to be showcased alongside national and international professional photographic peers and was considered a massive highlight for all involved.

Use of space in Kirkby

The project made use of its locality in a variety of ways. Firstly, the work was a rumination on Kirby and its residents, and the photography predominantly took place in a central location in the town. Secondly, the group visited local areas of interest such as Dovecot House, a Georgian building which captivated the group. Thirdly, the group were able to display exhibitions of their work in two prominent locations in the town.

Exhibition of artwork and interaction with the public

The exhibition was displayed in two settings: firstly, in Kirby Gallery. This venue was met with a muted response from the group, as they had previous experience of exhibition the 'Winds of Change' project in the main gallery space, but due to a clash with another exhibition happening at the same time this wasn't possible for *We Are Kirkby*:

We were expecting the gallery but we were pushed into a small hallway so I was a bit disappointed.

Secondly, a repurposed empty shop space (Unit 17) in the town centre was used. This was opened every Friday and staffed by members of the group (a condition of it being opened to the public). This space was much more popular with the group:

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uEMah46yLwA>

⁵ These names are not anonymised as they appear in the publicly available film

The shop space was bigger and better, and dedicated just to our group only.



Poster for the We Are Kirkby exhibitions.

The Unit 17 pop-up gallery was open from September-November 2019. The number of visitors varied per week (weather appeared to be a major factor), but the record for one day was 49 visitors. Interestingly, group members commented that visitors often thought that due to the exhibition's title, group members who were present were often asked about what was happening in the town centre redevelopment by visitors who were looking for information.

Partnership

The *Kirkby Futures* group are based in the Northwood Community Centre and are involved in many other groups there (including ones not related to *Young at Art*). However, they have met with other groups within the network and have visited FACT and taken portraits there. The group has also been to HOP events at TATE and the Museum (see [Events](#)).

Outcomes

- Older people engaged in creative photography activities
- Sense of community developed in the group
- Visits to local cultural areas of interest organised
- Photography skills and knowledge of the participant group developed
- The local area and community explored through photography
- Arts outputs exhibited within the local community, with residents as the target audience

- Older people leading the public conversations in the shopping centre exhibition space

Legacy and sustainability

The use of the shop space for the gallery was ended prior to the Coronavirus lockdown and an evaluation session had already taken place to discuss how the group could take their own photographic projects forward in the future. They all showed an interest in working intergenerationally with local Schools, of which OEG proposed as part of the Knowsley borough of culture programme in 2022. Whilst the main project with the Kirkby groups had finished, OEG continued to engage with the group over lockdown with postal activity packs⁶ sent out to each participant (as they do not on the whole engage online) and they kept in contact via post and phone. In other strands of OEG programme, e.g the North Liverpool Clickmoor project with My Clubmoor, the photographers worked with the group over a number of weeks to relocate activity to an existing private Facebook group, setting weekly themes and photographic ideas to research and explore from home. The photographers also trained the participants in using Zoom so they could hold more collective online gatherings during their regular Wednesday session time.

OEG started a new collaborative photography project with Watch Factory CIC (Community Integrated Care) in Prescot, Knowsley working with residential care setting residents on a new photography club. They commissioned local artist Alun Kirby for the role which was through an open call and interview process with our CIC partners. This is the final project delivered under the current Celebrating Age funding. They focused on socially distanced activity and activity via online and postal engagement to begin with due to restrictions in force during the pandemic. Their on-going collaborative projects in Runcorn and Clubmoor (North Liverpool) continued with additional funding from Paul Hamlyn Foundation with a group exhibition of the work produced across both programmes called 'Collective Matters'⁷ shown at Open Eye Gallery and in the local communities in Autumn 2021. OEG are inviting the Northwood Golden Years group to meet with the new Watch Factory photography group to share their experience of working on a project.

⁶ https://openeye.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/OPENEYE_OVER60S_PHOTOGRAPHYPACK.pdf

⁷ The VR version of the show is available here: <https://openeye.org.uk/whatson/vr-collective-matters/>

Happy Older People: The Wednesday Club

Created by National Museums Liverpool in 2014, Happy Older People (HOP) is a network which promotes age-friendly arts participation, the only network of its kind in the North West. Network membership is diverse and includes older people, arts and heritage organisations, health and social care professionals and providers, housing associations, transport providers and community groups. It is designed to bring these groups together, with the aim of increasing the level of cultural participation by older people, and to support vulnerable older people to participate in cultural activity, including those experiencing isolation, physical and mental ill-health, memory loss, and those with caring responsibilities, with the aim of making a difference to their quality of life.

One of the ways in which they aim to achieve this is by supporting and commissioning activity in the community led by network members. Specifically, the distribution of funds from the 'HOP Pot': small grants which enable a variety of diverse organisations to engage older people with arts and cultural projects across the Liverpool City Region. 'HOP Pots' of up to £300 each are made available to put towards new partnership projects developed by an arts or cultural organisation working alongside a community/older people-focused organisation to help make it easier for older people, particularly those who are isolated, to access the arts. HOP projects cover a variety of craft sessions and or activity-based projects, addressing social isolation, increasing levels of physical activity, and breaking down barriers for older people using new technology. Some projects worked with professional artists and film makers from other organisations⁷. In other projects, such as the case study below, the artist was the lead applicant and project manager. HOP membership currently stands at 395 members. In the last two years, HOP has been funded by National Museums Liverpool, Liverpool City Council, Arts Council England's 'Celebrating Age' programme and a small number of donations.

Case Study: - Art Through the Looking Glass

Art Through the Looking Glass was funded by a HOP Pot small grant. Participants were drawn from The Wednesday Club, who, as their name would suggest, meet on a weekly basis. Although the numbers fluctuate, usually about a dozen attend every week, and 12 participants took part in this project overall. Most of the group are in their 80s, but the age range goes from the 70s to the 90s. The group has slightly more women than men and is predominantly white British. They meet in the Orrell Trust, which is based at St John and St James Church and Community Centre, an ample facility located in a residential part of Bootle.

This HOP Pot project was focused on intergenerational work between the group and eight schoolchildren from the local Kings Leadership Academy School. The focus of the work was the Inspired by Alice exhibition at The Atkinson arts venue in Southport. The Orrell Trust used the funds from their HOP Pot for materials and the trip to this venue. The group leaders and teachers facilitated creative sessions with the participants. Collaboratively, a series of artworks were produced through the summer of 2019 which were displayed in the

⁷ <http://www.light-factory.co.uk/resonance/>

School in an exhibition launched in September 2019.

Intended outcomes

- To promote intergenerational collaborative artwork between an older people's group and local schoolchildren
- To offer a field trip to The Atkinson for the participants
- To display arts outputs in an exhibition at a local school

Data collection methods

The researchers spoke to the Lead Artist, observed a group session and conducted a focus group with participants from the project.

Commissioning process

The HOP Pot small grants are usually 'launched' each year at a public event. Usually members come along to the event to find out more and make an application soon after. To obtain a HOP Pot small grants of up to £300, community groups and organisations need to complete a brief, straightforward application form. In the last quarter they received 13 applications of which 5 were funded. HOP holds quarterly network meetings to enable professionals to share best practice. Previous successful participants and project leads are invited back to share their experiences - what works and what didn't work. Their projects may inspire or inform future applicants.

Artistic process and model of engagement

Prior to the HOP project, the group had been working with Older Persons Development Officer Mary Carr. Mary is a trainee Art Psychotherapist (MA) and has other art-based qualifications (BTech National Dip Art and Design, HND Fashion Technology, BSc Textile Design). She is also a practicing artist and the group had been making artwork mainly due to her interest and enthusiasm, although the only activity that was specifically mentioned by the group was making Christmas cards. In a sense, the HOP activity was seen as another in a suite of activities, rather than a separate discreet project:

I have heard of HOP, but we don't call ourselves that. We're just The Wednesday Club.⁸

It is not NML's intention for HOP Pot beneficiaries to necessarily know that they are taking part in a HOP project. The project manager at the Orrell Trust is in effect the HOP member, and NML do not work directly with the beneficiaries, so the set up is different from the other two projects. The funding is to stimulate and support activity in the community that benefits older people.

⁸ Mary is the only member of the group who engages with HOP directly, and she takes best practice and learning from HOP back into the community setting.

A key requirement for HOP Pot funding is partnership. This does not necessarily have to be with an artist. For example, The Wednesday Club was a partnership between the project manager at the Orrell Trust and staff from Kings Leadership Academy, to deliver the intergenerational project. Eight girls from a local school came to the Orrell Trust over a period of several weeks to work on artwork with the group and also went on a trip with group members to The Atkinson, to gain inspiration from the exhibition. Eleven group members went alongside the girls from the school, who were accompanied by a member of staff from the school and some staff from the Centre. The project manager said that there was an element of pragmatism in choosing the Alice in Wonderland theme, due to the *Inspired by Alice* exhibition showing at The Atkinson at the time of the project. Children at the Kings Leadership Academy were already working on this theme for an exhibition in the school, so it was also an opportunity for intergenerational work around this theme. The group had previously had visits from children from the school to take part in activities (for example, playing bocchia). They were the only older people's group working with the children on this project.



Intergenerational group working for *Art Through the Looking Glass* (© Gareth Jones)

The arts activities the group undertook were in the main standard practices (painting and collage), although there was some variation within this. Although they were time restricted in the work which comprised weekly one-hour sessions, they were able to complete artworks in time for the exhibition. Although the group perceived that the centre already had the arts materials available to use, in actual fact these were purchased with the HOP-pot funding.

Members of the group explained that they were left to choose what they worked on and they were free to give their own interpretations of the exhibition when working on the art. The process was inclusive, and all contributed:

I have always been interested in art.

I haven't got any [artistic] ability at all. I just coloured in artwork that others drew!

The project manager explained that “even the most resistant people join in the activity eventually”, demonstrating how the HOP Pot funding helps to challenge the assumption that 'art is not for me' with some members of the community.

Overall, participants appear to have enjoyed the project and had a degree of ownership over the work:

I'm proud of my hedgehog!

I really like the way my Cheshire Cat collage turned out.

At the time of the focus group, the group were having a break from artwork, but planned to start making their own Christmas cards soon.

Use of The Orrell Trust

The Orrell Trust has a large main central hall and smaller breakout rooms, allowing for multiple activities to take place at the same time. At the time the group meets, it is usually a hive of activity. For example, on one occasion a movement group was taking place in the main hall and hand massages by volunteers in a breakout room at the same time as the focus group took place, and participants moved from one activity to another at their leisure.

Exhibition of the artwork and interaction with the public

On the first Saturday of September 2019, the Kings Leadership Academy launched its Alice in Wonderland exhibition in the school, which is proximal to the centre, but far enough away to pose difficulties for some of the less mobile members of the group to visit. Several pieces of art made by the group went into the exhibition. A few of the members of the group did go to the launch of the exhibition (the project manager said the numbers would have been higher, but it clashed with a Liverpool FC match!) Those who attended the event were positive.

I thought it was very good, lots of people there.



Art Through the Looking Glass exhibition and older people's projects description at Leadership Academy, Bootle

The project manager noted that other GCSE artwork at the school which was not connected with the project they were working on caught the groups attention:

Some of the group showed an interested in more abstract and political artwork on display in the school.

A photo record of the artwork was taken by a professional photographer and displayed on connected social media sites. The exhibition remains present at the school “for the foreseeable future” and the project manager had just organised a coach trip for other members of the group to give everyone the opportunity to view it. She wants members of the Wednesday group to see it the exhibition, not just online.



Art Through the Looking Glass exhibition at King's Leadership Academy, Bootle

Partnership

The key partnership in this project was with the Kings Leadership Academy School. This was a continuation of previous intergenerational work done involving six pupils and older people who use the Orrell Trust Centre. This was a reciprocal relationship, with pupils from the school

benefitting with interaction with older people at the Centre, and in turn, member of The Wednesday Club seeing their artwork displayed in an exhibition at the School.

Outcomes

- Older people became more engaged in traditional, creative arts-based activities
- Encouraged a sense of inclusivity for participants who were initially unconfident in their artistic abilities
- Developed a sense of community within the group
- Enabled visits to cultural sites (such as galleries) in the local region
- Connected with local schoolchildren and the wider community through intergenerational arts-based activities
- Artwork outputs were displayed at public exhibition in local school, attracting the attention of the local community to the work of the Orrell Trust Centre.

Legacy and sustainability

As part of *Young at Art*, the HOP network was scheduled to deliver four funded network meetings (in April, July, October and December 2020). It was unfortunately unable to deliver the intended HOP network meetings in April and July 2020 due to the national restrictions, but was able to deliver an extended online event to celebrate the International Day of Older Persons on 1 October, 2020. HOP adapted its monthly e-newsletter with news stories, network updates and artwork created by members during lockdown. The 'what's on' section shared activities people could do at home on their own, or with friends and/or loved ones (virtual arts and cultural activity and good news stories) when it wasn't possible to promote in-person activity. The HOP steering group meeting was rescheduled for the first week of May 2020 and went ahead as a virtual meeting. The group discussed how network members are being served during this time and continued digitally with online activity until *The Wednesday Club* was able to reconvene in person at the Orrell Trust. A virtual HOP network meeting was arranged in December 2020 which explored creative approaches to resilience and staying upbeat during the pandemic, including participatory sessions on comedy and clowning.

Extension of *Young at Art* Programme

In 2021, additional *Young at Art* projects were run by FACT, the OEG and the NML, again funded by Arts Council England and The Baring Foundation. UCLan conducted a small-scale evaluation of these follow-up projects to identify the organisational learnings for the potential benefit of future YAA projects. This was achieved by focus groups and interviews with participants, project leaders and artists from the projects.

FACT: Rituals of Loneliness

Rituals of Loneliness is a collection of three digital artworks by artists Shonagh Short, Linda Stupart and Ayesha Tan Jones, created in collaboration with intergenerational groups of adults and young people from Liverpool. These artists were specifically chosen for the project by FACT's Learning team. Meeting and working together on Zoom, each artist took a separate group and in workshops shared their personal tactics to dealing with life during the Covid-19 lockdown. The sessions were meant to explore and celebrate the new rituals that were performed as a result of the pandemic. This project was as much about the artists developing their practice as it was supporting the local community members who were taking part. The artistic outputs from each group were shown together in an exhibition at FACT Gallery from September-October 2021.



Shonagh Short, *Rituals of Loneliness* (2021). Image courtesy the artist.

Focus groups were conducted with two of the artists from the project (Shonagh Short and Linda Stupart) and two participants (from Linda and Ayesha's groups), alongside the FACT Learning Manager and Learning Producer. The brief for the project was as follows:

The artworks reflect on the rituals that have made us feel more connected to the world around us during the past year of isolation. What have we done that has made us feel less

lonely? What have we shared? What things did we choose to protect? What have we lost? What have we learnt?

The artists were intrigued by the brief: “the questions felt quite rigorous and exciting.”(Linda Stupart, Artist). Working online with groups on Zoom was described as a “new experience” (Shonagh Short, Artist). Prior to beginning, group members were given an opportunity to choose which artist they wanted to work with based on examples of their previous work. Three separate groups were formed. The groups varied in size from six to ten participants, with a mixture of younger and older participants, sometimes evenly balanced, and worked over three sessions. This presented some technological issues as well as “glitchyness” (Shonagh Short, Artist). The older participants were generally adept at using the technology, even if it did sometimes require a financial outlay:

We were fine with zoom. I did have to buy a new computer. Right? Yeah, because my computer decided it wasn't good. It didn't have a camera! So. I did have to invest [but] it's really good (Participant).

The experience of the Zoom sessions was described positively by artists:

It was great. I found the participants were like, amazingly generous as well, especially the older ones, like, I would set a task and they just [went for it] like, completely. (Shona Short, Artist).

Intriguingly for an intergenerational project, it was noted that often the young people participating in online discussions were more reluctant to turn their cameras on than the older people.

The participants themselves also described the sessions as a positive experience. Firstly, there was a good deal of rapport already established by the groups who had already met in person prior to the pandemic:

We all knew each other from the previous year. So...it seemed quite natural really and we sort of set off fine. There [were no] problems really getting to know each other...we were all already familiar with each other.

Ayesha’s group enjoyed hands-on experience:

I like doing the practical stuff. I really liked making the fermentation product.

They received ingredient package deliveries to their homes:

We made Kimchi, that was [in] the second session, this huge...box arrived with all the stuff to make it...a box of chillis...[a] carton with about 50 cloves of garlic. I mean that probably cost a bit as well!

Learning Manager Lucia Arias explained that these boxes were distributed as a way of keeping the experience personal whilst working within the confines of the pandemic and lockdown. This resulted in several learning experiences for the FACT team and the artists: preparation had to be finished much earlier for online delivery compared to in person delivery, sourcing and quantifying the materials for the participants required a lot of extra preparation work also. However, the boxes were an important way of showing care to the participants in a time when many were isolated.

Linda's group's themes of "witches, rituals and spells" and a connection to nature were enjoyed:

Linda said I want you to go outside and make a mask...so I went outside and gathered some leaves...and I made this mask and everyone loved it, and I loved it, and I still have it on wall you know....I love working with nature as well (Participant).

Linda was even able to share some of their own rituals and life, hosting one of the sessions from the community horse stable yard they volunteer at (albeit via the medium of Zoom).

The sessions rekindled participants' enjoyment of creating art:

It was nice to be involved in art again because you know I do a lot of craft work but to do actual art, I'd sort of forgotten how good it was you know? (Participant).

Linda took a flexible approach to their sessions and there was even room for members of the group to sing, one of whom had what they was described as a "beautiful voice". The use of Zoom was also welcomed during the pandemic:

It was really good time and something like that...during those periods of time where you couldn't be getting involved [in person]. The [project] really, really stimulated me into doing different things at home as well (Participant).

There was a final online session where the three groups came together but they did not see all the arts outputs until the launch event in person at FACT in September 2021. The artists were enabled by FACT to make choices about how they wanted to present the work from their groups. Three separate videos were produced which were combined into a rolling presentation, exhibited at the FACT Gallery. The three videos are in stark contrast to each other, as belies the different approaches from the artists. Ayesha's video dubbed 'We Ferment' featured the participants heavily in processed and effects-laden footage of Zoom sessions and had a clear fermentation theme with participants creating Kimchi (amongst other things); Shona's also features recorded Zoom sessions but with a more performative aspect, the participants all wearing identical masks. This was interspersed with animated drawn visuals and captions; Linda's featured stock footage of atomic bomb information videos sourced from 16mm film stock and edited together with subtitled quotations from the group, creating a sometimes disturbing film. The participants were not visible in Linda's. They commented that "I think some of my group will be disappointed that they're not in it" (which actually was the case for some of the participants after they had viewed the video at the launch) but made the distinction that it is their name that appears in the gallery next to the work and so they felt a responsibility to do the work themselves.

This was an experimental approach from FACT, as Learning Manager Lucia Arias explained:

We're very interested in what defines a participatory project, other ways to invite the participants into an artistic process. We chose these three artists because we wanted to explore where these practices could go... I'm very curious to see that (the artwork) because they have very different formats and ways of being artists, so they represent the process in completely opposite ways.



Linda Stupart *Rituals of Loneliness* (2021). Image courtesy of the artist.

This highlights the tension of representing participants' voices in artwork that is presented as part of a high-quality artistic endeavour meant for public display at the FACT gallery. It can be argued that this is a necessary tension which community participants need to accept when taking part in a project with a professional artist and displayed in such a high-profile gallery space, but at the same time there was a sense of detachment from some participants that the project felt to them as if it had very little to do with their experience. The participants spoke of inviting family to come and see the exhibition, but it was clear that some participants in groups were more visible in the artwork itself than others. However, when viewed as a whole, they are a diverse set of artworks that demonstrate just how contrasting an approach to this kind of work three distinctive artists can take. Furthermore, working online during the pandemic was different for the older participants, as their experience of interacting in this way was filtering into many different aspects of their daily lives, not just participating in this project. It could be that as well as negatives in terms of preventing the FACT team from having space for more informal chats with participants, that there were also positives in the sense that the participants were already having to learn to use this method of communication.

Open Eye Gallery: L – A City Through It's People

L— A City Through Its People brings together three distinct projects, the combined archives cover a time period of Liverpool from the 1950s to the present day. Spanning evolutions in industry, society, and leisure at a time of rapid change and challenge, they share unique approaches and perspectives in telling a story about Liverpool, its people, and the ideals that lend the city charm and a distinct personality. The title of the project refers directly to a previous gallery exhibition at Open Eye Gallery.

With contributions from projects Red, the Scottie Press archive and Tell It Like It Is, residents are encouraged to explore their own and shared histories through their photographs of loved ones, their memories and experiences through a series of prompts and activities. *RED* by artist Emma Case, examines being part of the Liverpool football family, featuring portraits, images, interviews and original memorabilia donated by the football fans. *Tell It Like It Is* is a collaborative project between photographer Ian Clegg and writer Laura Robertson. The image-text relationship ruminates on the shifting nature of the city, consisting of photographs that remained as negatives for forty years, introducing a collaborative perspective on the city from two creative practitioners who are also Liverpool residents. Scottie Press is Britain's longest-running community newspaper. It stands proud of its role as a collective voice that has united the neighbourhoods of North Liverpool over its 49 years in print, by publishing engaging, beneficial and informative grassroots journalism.

Two sets of boxes were produced to share with local residents – firstly, larger memory boxes which have images and audio, and will be invitations for conversation, and the box itself will be a piece of art for the residential home settings to keep. Secondly a lighter exhibition in a box, which is designed for individual use, to fit through a letter box, be durable, and produced in large print and large photographs to be used again and again.

For this case study, we focused on a “portable” version of *L - A City Through Its People* (the Memory boxes), which took place in care home Our House, Walton as part of National Arts in Care Homes Day (24th September, 2021). A focus group was conducted online with Project Manager Emma Case (Social Practice Programme Producer and artist in residence) and, Karen Trotter (Residential Care Home Manager at Our House), and a participant of the session who was resident of the care home.

Emma explained the rationale for taking the project into care homes:

[It] is an exhibition that we had over the pandemic [and] was a really local exhibition, it was about three different... Liverpool archives. But unfortunately, it was kind of closed for most of its run, I think it was open for maybe a week and a half. And...the pandemic...shined a light on the fact that if our building is closed, a lot of people obviously can't experience the gallery.

However, Emma argued that this was a problem that existed prior to the pandemic:

There's a lot of people that can't experience the gallery anyway, even when it is open for lots of different reasons...transport, just viability, getting into the city. You know, there's lots of reasons why people might like what we do, but just can't get here. And so we thought, let's make the exhibition, a portable version, put it in a box, and then take it to people instead.

Because of the archival nature of the show, Emma really wanted to take the work to residential homes “to not only give some stories, but hear some stories as well. And so to be like an instigator, really, it's like the beginning of the story. So we told a bit and then the residents were able to sort of fill in the blanks”. Images used in the project are taken from Scottie Press (Britain’s longest running community newspaper, based in North Liverpool with a focus on “visual activism and grassroots journalism”), which has been running for half a century and is a familiar publication to project participants. Images are donated by local residents or photographed by Scottie Press photographers.

Emma was connected with Karen, the Residential Manager of Our House, through another local artist who has worked with Karen previously. They set up the workshop at Our House speedily in order to be able to hold it on National Arts in Care Homes Day. Karen described Our House and why the proposed project was so suitable:

We’re supported living so we have an age range of 55 to 96...so our facilities are set up for...different ranges of disability. We do have several residents with dementia that we are managing to keep in the community rather than...off to nursing homes and that kind of thing...the dementia aspects...being able to relive memories, because that's where they're at, at this point in time in their heads. It's also about preventing it by having residents who are in a lot of respects or singing or dancing, but able to look at the photographs and pass on their memories. It kind of opens them up, it keeps the brain going. It causes conversations. I mean, two of our ladies actually knew people in the photographs!”



The group working together at Our House. Image courtesy of Emma Case

The session is a springboard to discussion, but Emma argues that there is also a creative element to the programme as a whole:

We have some images printed large with questions on the back. And so we would just share them out and people just ask the questions...and it just started conversations... although we concentrated on the memory side of it in the session, there's another element where you can kind of like story maps where you can write your own story around a photograph, there's an app, see where you can do like a collage....So it's about sort of having that exchange, and they can send those back to us.

The intention is for the work to continue after the session is over and the participants take a pack away with them:

There's quite a lot in the pack. And sometimes it's quite overwhelming to do all in one ...So they can take them and they can have them in their own flats, and they can just look at it at their leisure, really.



[Pat], a participant in the session at Our House, with a Scottie Press photo.

Image courtesy of Emma Case

Part of the success of the day coming together lay in the connection between Emma and Karen sparking immediately:

Emma was just the right person to do it...Because I think that helps as well... compassion...She was really interested in what people were saying, and really taking it on board. So a big part of it [is]how it comes across. And the person that's selling it to you and why. And you know, she was instantly at home... (Karen, Care Home Manager).

Emma also found the experience positive:

It's such a lovely exchange of information, it was great...just listening to everybody talk about the streets that they lived in. And you know, what their favourite sweets

National Museums Liverpool: House of Memories On The Road

National Museums Liverpool (NML)'s extension Happy Older People (HOP) network project was aiming to bring a mobile digital experience to communities in the city. This project had two elements: visits to House of Memories (HoM) On The Road (OTR)¹ and Connect My Memories, a tablet loan service with data and workshops to promote digital and cultural resources.

Dawn Carroll (Project Manager, Liverpool Museums) was interviewed for this case study. The project's focus on participants with dementia meant that we were unable to interview participants in the scope of the evaluation. HoM OTR's aims are to bring a mobile digital experience to communities in the city. In September 2021, the project set up an immersive mobile experience a van (pictured below) outside of the Museum of Liverpool which opened up to contain spaces for three video installations.



**House of Memories On The Road, Museum of Liverpool and The Three Graces
© Gareth Jones courtesy of National Museums Liverpool**

After consultation workshops with a group of older people from a number of local organisations and networks, films were developed around three themes to show on the screens within the mobile van: the Liverpool Overhead Railway, a typical 1950s/1960s Liverpool street and a 1950s style grocery store. The installation films created are a collaboration between Immersive Interactive and National Museums Liverpool. The immersive mobile space (the vehicle) was created by a company called Alfa Ltd. They worked

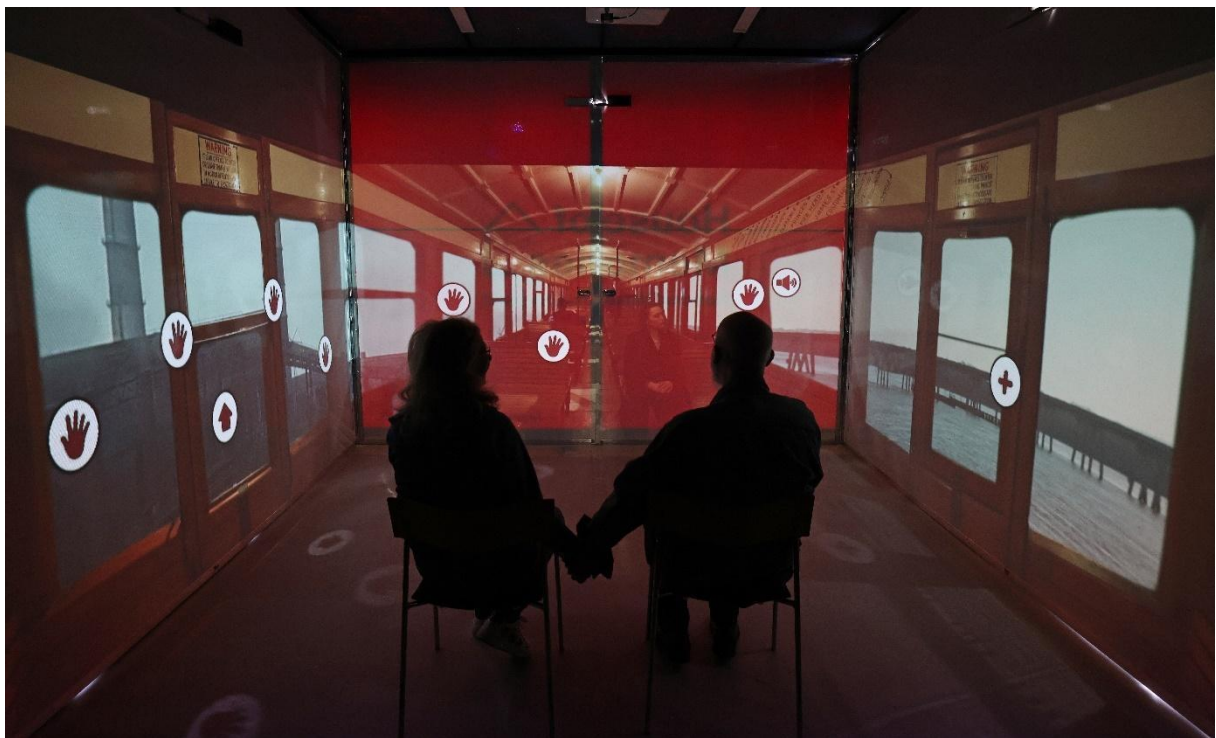
¹ Case studies from key stakeholders can be found here:
<https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/news/press-releases/house-of-memories-goes-road>

with Immersive Interactive on developing how the space is kitted out with AV and projectors.

Visitors from three different care / housing schemes in the region (Plus Dane Housing, Anchor Hanover and South Liverpool Housing) came to experience the HoM OTR van, which gave individuals a 10-15 minute intimate and immersive experience. The mobile van stimulated a wide-range of memories for visitors: These included memories about phone boxes, including calling a phone box to contact relatives and specific phone numbers from the past. Visitors felt that the HoM OTR was a great resource to stimulate memories and also to provide entertainment, including using physical activities such as the House of Memories memory loan boxes (boxes filled with artifacts users can touch).

HoM OTR was visited by the Director of the Creative Aging Development Agency (CADA), who gave positive feedback about the exhibition:

They were very interested in the functionality of the OTR AV set-up including the ability to start and stop movement in order to respond to the needs of specific residents [such as] those living with dementia who may find movement problematic.



A virtual trip on the Liverpool Overhead Railway
© Gareth Jones courtesy of National Museums Liverpool

The preview event in the Autumn has led to multiple bookings for the HoM OTR van and it now has over 20 separate events planned (e.g. a sheltered scheme with multiple venues has hired the HoM OTR to visit one of their settings and to bring residents from other homes across to experience it), enabling the project to reach more isolated communities in the region as well as fund the costs of maintaining the vehicle. The plan is for the HoM OTR van to run for the next several years, at least and ideally as long as it can be maintained. Dawn says that they are constantly seeking to make ways to improve the experience:

Although we have disability access, we are looking to lengthen the access ramps to make it even more accessible.

Following on from the preview event, NML hosted the HoM OTR / HOP discussion workshop. This was firstly an explorative session inside OTR so health, arts and cultural providers could see the new resource and inform the use of the HoM OTR mobile museum for the future. Secondly, it was a discussion session to flesh out those ideas and help shape future plans regarding the use of the mobile, to share learning and discuss how the HoM OTR van can best be used in communities for the benefit of HOP participants (the older people in this workshop were exclusively HOP members). Unexpectedly, this was attended more by beneficiary organisations (e.g. activity managers) rather than the creatives. However, the discussions were of value to Dawn and her colleagues as they were able to draw out the key learnings from the experience of HoM OTR, including: the potential to increase the diversity of the themes of the exhibitions (e.g. Black history); thinking creatively about which settings HoM OTR could be used in (e.g. whilst waiting for a GP appointment or vaccination); the potential to use social prescribing to access the exhibitions, ensuring isolated or excluded communities in Liverpool have opportunities to access this cultural experience. Dawn notes that “health organisations wanted to have the settings more than arts organisations” which has broadened the scope of organisations from which the programme can potentially draw on to engage people. Connections with other local work were also discussed, such as working with the Digital Ambassadors which could give older people a chance to produce some of the content of the exhibitions as well as experiencing them.

They have now expanded the original idea to create 'HOP On Board' relating to the use of the HOM OTR immersive mobile. They now have three different HOP On Board projects in progress which see OTR used as the inspiration for art, poetry, digital content and different workshops. Therefore, the sessions have led to new cultural opportunities for older people.

Conclusion

Key features of the programme

The purpose of examining the work of *Young at Art* through different case studies was to explore the different approaches that the programme takes towards including older people in the cultural ecology of the Merseyside region. The three case studies resulting from the evaluation showcase the diverse range of ways in which the programme can achieve these aims.

First and foremost, all the projects had older people engaged in creative arts-based activities. This varied from traditional art forms to innovative XR video-making. What was important in all the groups was for the lead artists and key staff from all partner organisations to get a sense of the individual group members' levels of ability and confidence in the creative activities they were undertaking, in order to be as inclusive as possible. Therefore, whilst more experienced photographers took pictures for Kirby Futures alongside those who learned during the project, unconfident artists coloured in others' drawings for the *Art Through the Looking Glass* exhibition.

A common thread running across the groups is a sense of community within each group. The groups bring together people of a broadly similar age and location with a shared interest. Even within this commonality, there are some important distinctions: for example, the HOP group were noticeably older than the Digital Ambassadors and Kirby Futures groups, highlighting how, in an age of increasing life expectancy, the 'over 60s' demographic is no longer a narrow age band. Across the groups, there are participants with age differences of over 30 years, which poses additional challenges to the *Young at Art* team as they seek to provide opportunities and activities for an increasingly varied group.

All the groups offered some form of trip or external activity, from visiting galleries to filming on location in the Liverpool courts. There was also, for the Open Eye Gallery and Digital Ambassadors projects, an explicit focus on the development of skills and knowledge in art forms that require a degree of technical expertise (photography and VR film). It would be accurate to say that it will be easier for participants to take learning from the former into their everyday lives outside of the project, due to the availability of the equipment required.

The HOP and Digital Ambassadors projects had an explicitly intergenerational focus, with school children and youth club members respectively. This appeared successful on both counts from the perspective of the older people, who talked about the young people they worked with in glowing terms.

Open Eye Gallery's project invited the participants to explore and reflect on the changes occurring in their local area and community through photography. The Digital Ambassadors project took this a step further, using the production of art as a provocation, posing a philosophical question to the group and ultimately the audience of the installation.

Finally, all the groups were working towards a public display of the arts outputs from their respective projects. HOP and Open Eye Gallery both kept their target audience local, with artwork displayed in a local school exhibition and gallery/pop-up gallery respectively, and in the latter case, with a clear focus on the locality it was exhibited in ('*Kirby Futures*'). In

addition to this one of the video works was shown in a main gallery exhibition (*'Kinship'*), this was an unexpected output of the Kirkby project which saw the group sharing main gallery space with international artists. Digital Ambassadors' projects art outputs were exhibited in the FACT gallery in central Liverpool. *Why can't we do this IRL?* Received and Honorary Mention in the prestigious Prix Ars Electronica Computer Animation 2021 awards².

There was a more explicit focus in this project on a high-quality and cutting-edge art output befitting of the exhibition. The Digital Ambassadors group appear empowered to come to FACT to do activities and attendance of and engagement with for the programme of performances or conversations is high.

Challenges for the programme

Some of *Young at Art's* greatest challenges were in deciding to work within the same area or with existing groups on new projects. There was a potential barrier with artistic offers seeming too repetitive or the groups remaining focused on ideas and themes. *Young at Art* was the opportunity to move older people from participating in workshops with a creative technology focus towards actively involving them in projects with artworks as an outcome. This is a gradual process, and as in previous projects it poses the question of how to keep existing relationships with groups fresh while entering into new collaborations. The original members of the group still discuss old projects with fond memories which can make FACT's own internal evaluations of individual projects a challenge, but also underlines that it is an on-going programme.

The older participants were generally very receptive to the use of digital technology and were able to understand how to use it. A cultural barrier comes in the form of the language that comes with using digital online tools: the lack of linear storytelling, the abundance of data and information, the simultaneous multiple perspectives in conversations and exchanges. These intense interactions can be overwhelming. It remains an ongoing question for *Young at Art*; to what extent do the older generation want to be in these spaces and, if so, what are the best ways to bring them into them?

An overarching challenge was access and travel for the target participant groups. The physical mobility of some of the participants or their geographical distance from the city centre (when activity might be based at Open Eye Gallery or FACT) affected participation. *Young at Art* includes access costs so taxis and assisted travel support can be provided but this budget may not be available for future projects. As mentioned previously, engagement of older people is strong and FACT had to work harder on making the young people feel "invited" into the space. Furthermore, a lot of activity is based in the local community, but there are still barriers with access to and around cultural buildings.

² <https://ars.electronica.art/prix/en/winners/computer-animation/#honorary>

Strategic response to the challenges

Young at Art's strategic response to the challenges they have faced has been to ensure planning and on-going consultation and discussion with participants (“dialogue is key” (Liz Wewiora)). They are at the planning stages of partnering with transport partners to specifically support access. This is something on which Liz Wewiora (Open Eye Gallery) wants to work with the rest of the *Young at Art* partners, prioritising how participants can be at the forefront of petitioning for support.

In terms of keeping existing relationships with groups fresh, *Young at Art* emphasises consultation with community groups and community partners. This helps them to understand what their role is as an external cultural organisation and whether projects have come to their natural end, or there is an appetite to continue to work together. They always work closely in partnership with community partners in the city region boroughs, to ensure the demand to collaborate is actually there, rather than imposing themselves on a community. For example, with the partnerships with Clubmoor and Community Integrated Care (for the Watch Factory care residency in Prescott) *Young at Art* were approached by the partners and community who were actively seeking to create a local photography group or project in their area. In Runcorn, the original women's group they had worked with on a previous project were now established as a self-sustaining photography group (Windmill Hill Snappers) and no longer needed support. A new all-male group had emerged, who wanted to create their own distinctive response to the local area.

Although all the groups operate separately, there were opportunities to network more widely in a series of *Young at Art* events in the region, enabling artists and participants to share experiences. In 2020, both the wider events and the week-to-week group activity were impacted upon heavily by the Covid-19 outbreak. Most notably, a Sharing Event, to be hosted by FACT, Open Eye Gallery and HOP was unable to go ahead as planned in May 2020. Additionally, FACT had secured funding from the Baring Foundation to a sum of £12,115, to deliver an Over 60's Conference and Workshop event, in collaboration with 64 Million Artists, at FACT in May, which was also postponed.

The suspension of face-to-face activity for the groups during the pandemic had the potential to impact negatively on participants in several ways: many of the participants are otherwise socially isolated; many are in the designated vulnerable age group which means the virus poses a potentially greater threat to their health; furthermore, many have limited means to access platforms such as Teams or Zoom to enable them to participate in online group activity, leading to further risk of exclusion by the digital divide. *Young at Art* worked to adapt how it engaged with participants to continue their programmes of activity wherever possible until face-to-face work was able to resume.

Next steps

- Explore how groups of participants respond to the artists' visions and how they feel represented in the process and the final work.
- Consider how arts organisations better explain the process of creating the artwork.

- Understand how cultural organisations create more opportunities for people to experience and participate in the creation of art, at varying engagement levels.

Outcomes

- Engaging a wide demographic of older people - *Young at Art* has involved older people in high quality arts-based activities, spanning 30 years in age difference.
- Intergenerational interaction – some projects have involved younger people as an integral part of the work, successfully breaking down generational divisions to the benefit of all parties.
- Building a community of practice – The various *Young at Art* groups have brought together local people who have shared a passion for art and enjoyed collaborating to produce new art.
- Linking groups to cultural institutions and places– The *Young at art* groups have linked participants with key cultural institutions in the city, extending accessibility to culture to audiences who may otherwise be culturally or physically excluded.
- Skills and confidence building across artforms – Participants have developed assurance in a range of artistic media from photography to complex/digital and hands-on/traditional work.
- Bridging the digital divide – Participants have gained experience and confidence in accessing technologies that are often assumed to exclude older people. They were able to develop a distinctive perspective on the ethics, modalities and impacts of their use with the potential to influence other audiences, galleries and cultural sector workers.
- Validation of participants’ artwork – the public displays of work produced in the projects afforded a sense of recognition of their achievements.