

MarketPlace case study: The Creative Collective and Mantelpiece



What is the MarketPlace offer?

MarketPlace is about culture, community and creative conversation in Fenland and the Forest Heath area of West Suffolk. MarketPlace operates within and around the seven market towns of Wisbech, March, Mildenhall, Newmarket, Brandon, Whittlesey and Chatteris. MarketPlace utilises a delivery model of on the ground Creative Agents to provide in-person support and visibility. Through this, it connects and nurtures:

- partnership development,
- community advocates and leaders,
- project delivery,
- community research,
- new creative and artistic experiences,
- artists' ability to meet the needs of local audiences.

MarketPlace has local voice at the heart of how and why it works but wanted a way to create more connectivity, sharing and learning between active and willing community members known for getting things done. The MarketPlace Creative Agents identified local people with a passion for where they live, their local community and being creative and approached them to start meeting regularly to form The Creative Collective.

The purpose of The Creative Collective is to increase more connection and collaboration between the towns and to inform the type of cultural programming undertaken by MarketPlace. Nurturing these community advocates to try new things and increase their leadership potential is part of the collective experience. Find out what they have been up to this last year and if you want to get involved and represent your MarketPlace town, then why not get in touch with the team to find out what's involved and whether it's right for you?

SOW
Connection
Innovation

The Creative Collective and Mantelpiece

The Creative Collective and Mantelpiece

The Creative Collective is a way to develop local and shared cultural knowledge and ambition. Extending beyond the Creative Forums model through community representatives, the purpose of the Collective is to create cross-town learning and increase the quality of cultural commissioning. This year the Creative Collective has been integral in the commissioning process, user testing potential roll-out projects and matching artist ideas with relevant communities.

The Creative Collective directly builds on work developed in Phase 1 to give opportunities for local voice to feed into MarketPlace programming. The group had newly formed at the end of Phase 2 Year 1 and had begun joint planning a new programme of activity to roll out across the seven towns. Due to the pandemic, Creative Collective shifted to Zoom meetings thanks to their commitment to continuing this voluntary role throughout the pandemic. The group became the community review and critical friend element of the new tiered commissioning programme, enabling them to have an insight and experience of the whole commissioning process whilst valuing their time commitment and utilising their skills and knowledge appropriately. As a group of local people, they inspire others to help organise events to happen within their towns.

Their role as commission review meant that they could authentically assess the relevance of an artist's ideas to their communities and suggest relevant local interest themes and things to consider in the delivery and promotion of the work for it to be accessible. The MarketPlace team identified a commission with the potential for cross-generational roll out across the towns. In discussion with the Creative Collective, they selected the commission as one they would participate in themselves.

"As doers, and organisers they are often too busy behind the scenes and we thought it would be lovely to share something of who they are and allow them to participate for once."

- Ali, Creative Agent

Artist Michelle Brace proposed an oral storytelling project connected to objects under the title Mantelpiece.

"I adopted a project I've had in my mind for quite a several years but I was forced to make it digital because of COVID – it was great in that it got me to realise it, it was a photographic project. Visiting people's homes – the uncomfortableness of that as I captured their stories and photos of their mantelpieces. This is much nicer a community of objects and represents a community, enables a conversation and that sharing. It's just much nicer and it being a composite piece of digital art."

- Michelle Brace, artist

Mantelpiece is a project in which groups share stories associated with objects to create a collective digital portrait of who they are to accompany their oral stories. It has a very clear simple structure – set a group a brief to choose an object in their home and to share why it's important, what it says about who you are, and a memory associated with it. In the sharing of the story, it gets recorded. Each object is photographed and composited into a group shot around mantelpiece, a place known for showing prized possessions.

"This book was a revelation as it presented everything in a very different way and the story was told in a spider diagram way, You could move from piece to another piece. He related it as a creative moment – a revelation of 'I do fit in the world' it made him feel ok about himself and he revealed he's different and thinks differently because of it."

- Michelle Brace, artist, reflecting upon one of the stories

Participant experience

The brief submitted by Michelle was shared with the group and an introductory session with Michelle explored the project and the purpose of the items they would choose.

A second session enabled the group to share their stories and objects.

"It served their purpose in uniting the group, it gave insights into how they tick and who they were as people beyond their interest as part of this group and representatives of part of their communities.

They were revealing quite vulnerable things, it was human and lovely."

- Michelle Brace, artist

The personal revelations and insights into each other have enabled the group to connect in new ways. This could be a valuable project for breaking down barriers and helping new groups connect. The process of piloting the project with the Creative Collective means that advocates for the process and the impact are created.

"I love doing it. I was very reticent to start with I thought, Oh dear, this is not for me, but you know, it made me push the boundaries....having to sort of think outside my sphere of, or my box, I had to work a bit, think about it and have a go. I was quite pleased in the end, no one else might like it."

- Godfrey, Creative Collective member

In sharing the stories with each other there was a natural sharing of memory without any pressure.



[Click here to read about Ali's object – her wonky tool.](#)



[Click here to read about Godfrey's object – his didgeridoo.](#)



[Click here to read about David's object – his Starship Traveller Adventure Game Book.](#)



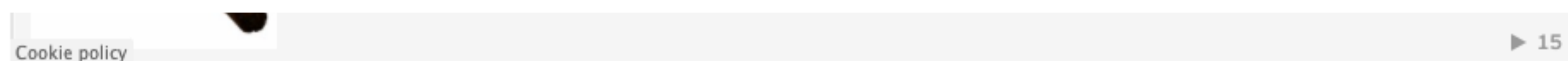
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mich_unlocked · Godfrey's Didgeridoo

[Click here to read about Godfrey's object – his didgeridoo.](#)



mich_unlocked · David's Starship Traveller Adventure Game Book

The challenge came from the quality of the Zoom audio being too low and requiring each participant to record their own audio individually. This created a need for technical support and a level of pressure to share the story engagingly, whilst reciting it without an audience present.

"When Michelle came back to you and you said to me, do you wanna have another go at it? And I, and I said, no, cause I was going to be far more self-conscious next time."

- Godfrey, Creative Collective Member

"I'm still making more mistakes actually. So I'm surprised how much of a challenge that is to go through it without actually stumbling while you're reading it. it's quite nice if you make a mistake occasionally or you pause for breath because you can't find your words cause that's the human person ... So don't aim for perfection because it wasn't really bad. We can cut things out. But actually, those are the moments when it comes to life because you suddenly think 'Oh, it's somebody real."

- David, Creative Collective Member

The shared reflection process helped the group realise the teething issues with the technology set up of the approach but also identified how they could support each other to submit their contributions.

It identified further learning for Michelle in skills required to realise her ideas in a digital landscape and the need for digital guidance from MarketPlace.

Creating and experiencing a digital project has enabled The Creative Collective to challenge themselves and how they can advocate for such activity within their communities.

"I think my perception of art and it's interaction with the audience has evolved in the last year. VR and remote experiences are certainly an avenue in experiencing art."

- David, Creative Collective Member

The Creative Collective described the experience as inspiring, interesting and creative.

The recognition of personal growth and joy of accessing memories that hadn't been shared and thought about for a long time was a powerful experience; with the moment of identifying your object to share being a highlight in the experience.

The rich part for the Collective was the shared experience. Identifying that for a wider rollout is a key outcome for groups.

Action learning and next steps

The new MarketPlace website was being built when this project was being delivered. However, the technical elements of the project and the housing of digital content was a key challenge.

The level of technical support digital projects required for effective sharing, content embedding and production requirements, are skill sets not all artists transitioning into this sphere have.

David, from the Creative Collective, was offering technical advice and support to the artist in this instance because of his production background.

Establishing clear responsibility of hosting digital content and the ownership of this type of creative data needs to be considered at a contract stage, alongside what the technical specifications are to support certain outputs.

As a new area of work and development for MarketPlace, considering retainer days with technical support to consult on such projects at a planning and implementation stage would be an additional asset in upskilling the team in managing these types of projects.

The testing and piloting nature of the commission structure enables artists who want to test out new ideas the opportunity to invest time in developing these skills and realising the limits and potential of their ideas.

The project highlights a consistent learning curve for the artists in delivering new ways of working in transitioning into a digital realm to reach and engage audiences. Supporting this type of skills development is a necessary part of ensuring the resilience of the sector locally.

MarketPlace is part of the Creative People and Places programme developed by Arts Council England with support from National Lottery funds:



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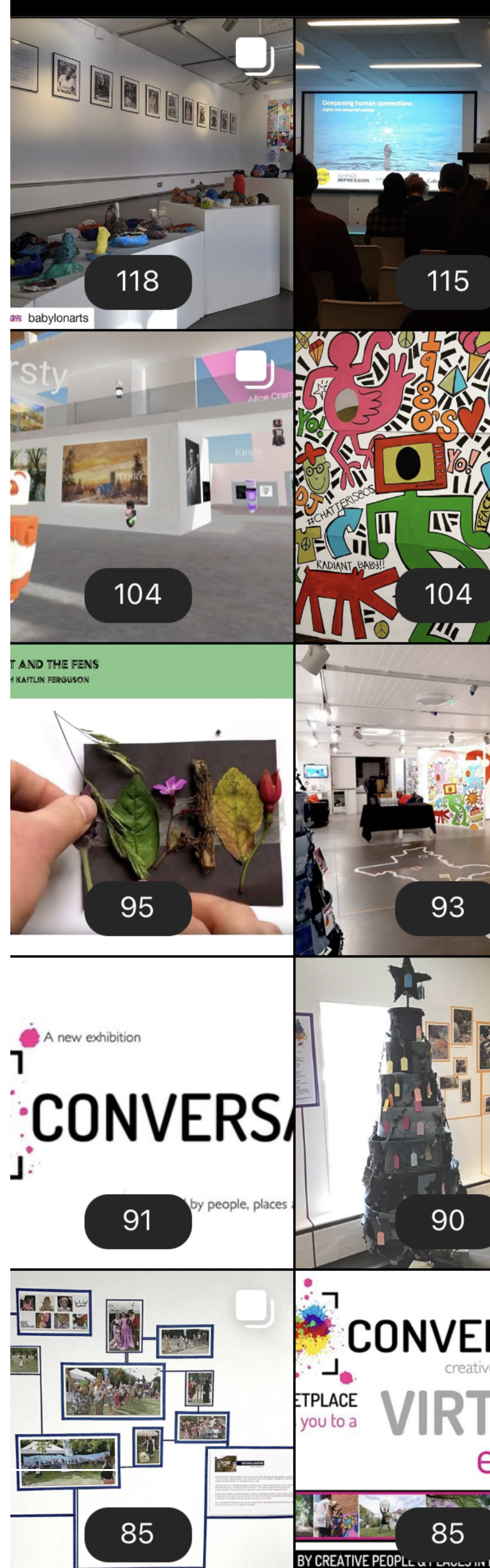
MarketPlace is supported by:



MarketPlace is run by a Consortium of Partners consisting of:



www.cppmarketplace.co.uk



Photography credits to:

- Michelle Brace
- Participants from the projects



We Are Frilly is founded on the principles of process-driven participatory practices that extend from co-designing on a project level, strategic planning and cultural accountability through creative evaluation.

www.wearefrilly.com

[E: Kirsty@wearefrilly.com](mailto:Kirsty@wearefrilly.com)