A LITTLE SQUARE CORNER

A Learning in Partnership Dialogue:
Collaboration Across Boundaries

A note about the title

This title refers to a conversation with one participant during a project, *FOUR (2024)*, led by artist Ain Bailey in collaboration with four imprisoned men. Together, they created an audio piece using songs and sounds meaningful to them and their significant others. Participants then edited their individual pieces, which Bailey produced into a long audio piece that was shown in the art gallery. When Bailey went back to present the work to the participants, and they saw the photographs of the gallery, one of them said:

> *"I thought we'd just have a little square corner, like someone just said, a couple of headphones. Ahh, listen to that, what does that mean? But I think the actual setup is appropriate to the music, to the sounds that are coming out, and I think for people who will look into that, they'll know exactly what that means."*

While we were putting this resource together, we thought this personal reflection was an appropriate account of the expectations of the participants and how they feel when their work is presented as a major installation in a city-centre gallery – and also a reminder of how most of these participants never get to see the final presentation of their hard work.

Note on consent and anonymity

These conversations formed part of our reflection on the arts partnership and the experiences of those involved. Contributors who wished to be acknowledged by name in this resource have reviewed and approved the use of their name, role and attributed quotations.

The learnings explored in this resource are based on our experience working together on a long-term project. Securing anonymity would be very difficult, as the projects and outcomes have already been presented publicly.

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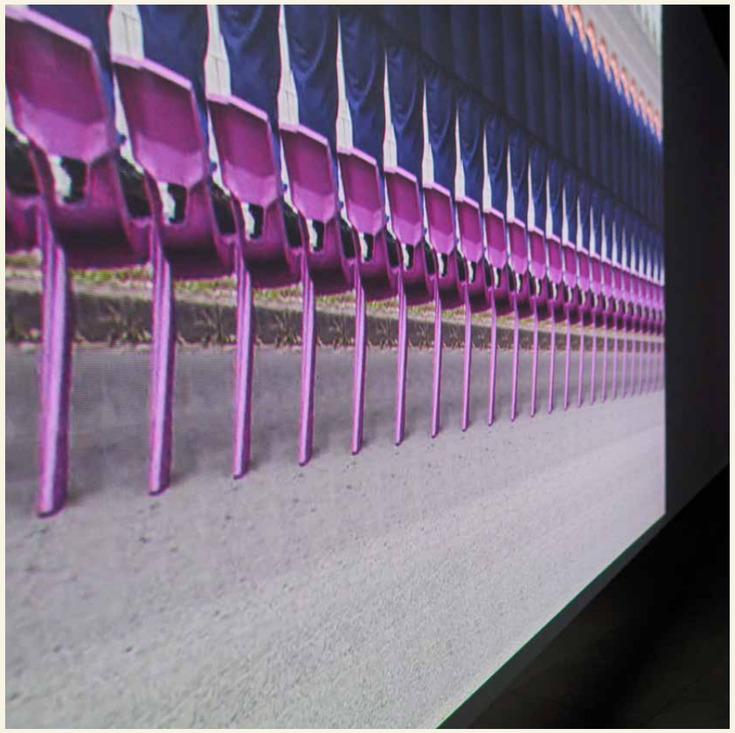
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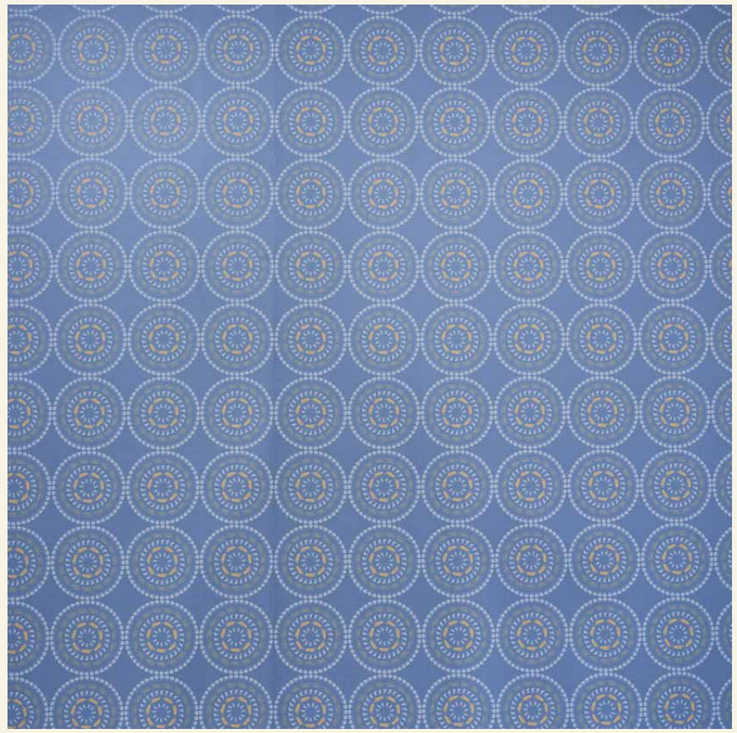


Melanie Crean, *A Machine to Unmake You (M2UY)*
(2019-2024)

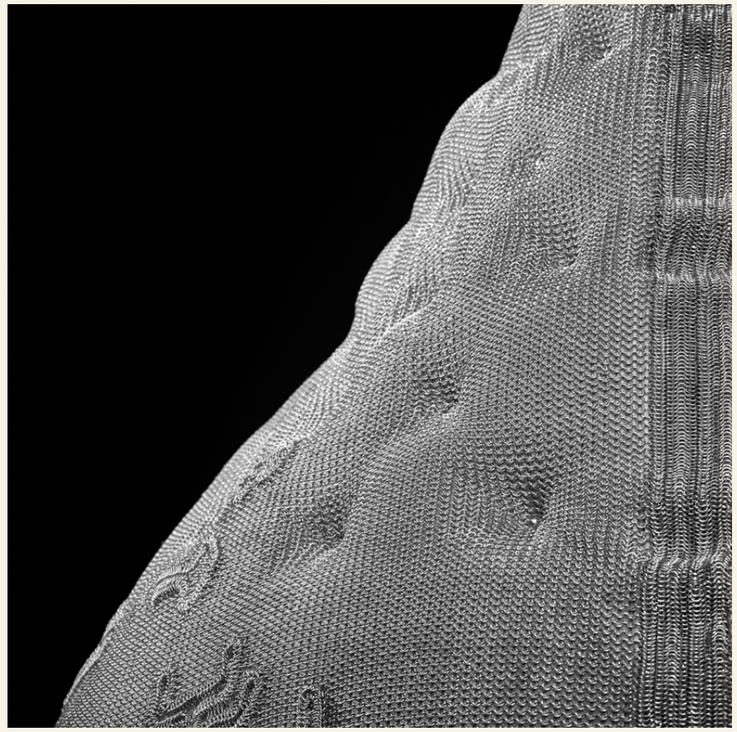


Katrina Palmer, *Sentences*
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Installation views at FACT Liverpool.
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Foreword by Dr Emma Murray

It has taken more than a decade to reach this page. That is not a confession of slowness but, we have come to think, part of the point. What follows is a reflection on a long partnership between criminology and the art gallery, between my work as a Criminologist and the Learning team at FACT Liverpool, and it introduces a set of resources that grew out of it. We did not want to name what we were doing before we properly understood it. Some of the most significant learning arrives not through design but through the slow accumulation of shared experience over time.

This resource grew out of that kind of accumulation, as years of working together across disciplines, institutions and very different relationships to knowledge finally had time to be accounted for. And yet to say that feels too settled. These things are always moving: understanding shifts, and learning does not arrive at a destination. What we hope readers take from these pages is not a method to copy, but a sense of what becomes possible when different ways of knowing are given time, trust and care to meet. What is gathered here is not a conclusion, but a pause, a moment of taking stock together before the work continues.

It began, in one sense, with a role as a critical friend in 2014, which evolved into my joining the Learning team at FACT as Criminologist in Residence in 2019. Neither of us intended this role to last this long. We came together with something close to shared values: about knowledge, and who gets to hold it; about power, and who gets to be heard; about visibility, and on whose terms people are seen; about storytelling, and taking seriously what people living through the criminal justice system have to say about their own lives; and about care, and the dignity it demands. We did not always share the same practices, but these values held us together. Yet we occupy very different working cultures. The rhythms of an art gallery and the rhythms of a university rarely move at the same pace, and the institutional, and at times disciplinary, differences between us took a long time to work through properly. What that sustained, embedded engagement produced, through corridor conversations and creative workshops, and from each of our vantage points on the art commissions, was a kind of trust that only time makes possible.

Much of our learning took shape through *Resolution*[1], a project with a deceptively simple aim: to take artworks made with people in prison into the art gallery. To bring those works, and the people, experiences and truths embedded in them, out of institutional obscurity into public life. Those working in public, cultural or visual criminology may find something familiar in that impulse. So may those in narrative criminology, which attends to the stories people tell about themselves (Maruna, 2001; Presser and Sandberg, 2015), and in "Convict Criminology" and lived-experience criminology, which have each highlighted the distinctive insights generated through lived experience and the role of creative methods in making these perspectives visible within research, policy and public life (Booth and Harriott, 2021; Buck et al., 2023; Earle, 2016). During the residency, alongside *Resolution*, I felt and learned from a particular kinship with the *Distant Voices* project, a separate collaboration in which songwriting and song-sharing between people with experience of punishment, artists and criminologists opened questions of reintegration and belonging. It showed how sharing creative work can itself become an act of hospitality, inviting audiences into the question of how people come home (Urie et al., 2019).

When read together, these works show a long tradition in that field of insisting that knowledge about punishment, harm and survival belongs not only in academic journals but in the places where publics gather to think and feel. *Resolution* was not designed as an exercise in these public criminologies, and it would be too neat to claim it as one. But it asked a question that public forms of criminology also asks: *what happens when the experiences of people living with the effects of incarceration are taken seriously on their own terms, in spaces built for encounter rather than explanation*? Where *Resolution* differed was in its answer. It was art that was offered, not argument. And that distinction, it turned out, mattered in ways that took years, for all of us, to fully understand.

This resource is not a continuation of *Resolution*. That work was funded through the art gallery rather than the university, which gave us time and the luxury of not having to name what we were doing too soon. The *UKRI Imagining Possible Futures* project [MR/Y017110/1] then invited us to put some of that unhurried thinking into words, and to ask how the learning around creative work might travel beyond the gallery.

Central to that workstream was a genuine curiosity about the relationship between two fields — participatory criminology and participatory arts — that have been moving, often independently, in similar directions in justice-related spaces. Both have been developing new thinking about whose knowledge counts, how it is gathered, and what it might be for. Bringing those traditions and the institutions that hold them (an art gallery, a university, a prison) into partnership was at the heart of what this project set out to do. Over time, it became clearer that these two fields meet less in shared vocabulary than in shared commitments, and that a project's design, from the outset, largely determines whether that meeting is generative or whether one discipline is reduced by the other. The residency was never a place where one discipline taught the other, but a space of making together, where learning moved in more than one direction and each of us was changed.

This is not a guide. What follows is closer to a set of honest reflections from a community of people, who stayed in something difficult together long enough to understand what they wished they had known at the start. These pages offer only what was found there, held together by many different hands.

The aspiration to work across arts and social science is easier to name than it is to sustain. What is less often named is what genuine interdisciplinary collaboration actually requires, and the conditions under which disciplines do not merely exchange but begin to transform one another. That move demands time, trust, and funding models that extend beyond universities and their timelines. It requires, most fundamentally, a willingness to be undone by the encounter (see also; Murray 2024; Murray et al,. 2025). That willingness was not the possession of any one person or institution. It was practised, imperfectly and collectively, across many moments.

We are still learning what that practice asks of us. But in this resource, we begin, tentatively, to name some of the hallmarks of our collaboration, in the hope that something so situated might hold insights useful to others working on similarly natured projects and research questions. It is, at once, a case study and an encounter. And, in that spirit we begin.

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[1] *Resolution* is a participatory arts and research programme produced by FACT Liverpool within the justice system that ran from 2018 to 2025, https://www.fact.co.uk/resolution.

Introduction

This resource brings together reflections from artists, prison staff, criminologists and participatory arts producers involved in creating artworks with people in prison. These artworks were presented in exhibitions at FACT Liverpool, a centre for art, film and the creative use of technology. FACT centres participants as storytellers — supported by artists, making art becomes a learning experience that gives participants space to challenge their understanding of the world and explore who they are. FACT's Learning team[2] has been facilitating and producing participatory arts work for many years. This programme has taught us a great deal, and not always in ways we anticipated. Much of what is gathered here we learned by doing, by staying with difficulty, by making mistakes in good faith and trying to understand them. We offer it not as expertise to be transferred but as experience to be thought with. This research project and partnership gave us a rare opportunity to look carefully at what that experience had produced, and to ask what it might offer to others working in and beyond this space. This resource is orientated forwards. It is less a record of what happened and more an attempt to explore that learning as it travels.

How this resource came together

It was gathered through informal conversations, public events and dedicated reflective sessions and an evaluation with those who worked and participated in the programme. It brings together the perspectives of the many different people and roles that participatory arts work depends upon. We wanted the way this resource was made to reflect the collaborative process it describes. The voices here are multiple because the work always was.

FACT's approach is led by artistic collaboration. We invite artists to lead on the creative vision of each project, and each artist brings a different way of engaging with context, with participants, with their own lived experience, and ways of working. Participatory arts is a relational practice. It asks for compassionate listening, for genuine attentiveness to context, and for a willingness to be changed by the people you work with. We do not claim that our projects are community-led or strictly Socially Engaged Arts practice, however this programme shares much of the ethos of community-led work: artists, participants, cross-sector collaborators and the team at FACT become, through each project, a community working together to make something. The distinctions between roles did not disappear, but they became less important than the shared endeavour.

Who this resource is for

This resource is designed for people who are curious about artistic approaches to working with those living with the effects of incarceration, and who may be arriving at that curiosity from many backgrounds. We hope that it is of interest for criminologists and social scientists curious about the arts; for arts organisations and practitioners considering partnerships with researchers or justice institutions; for prison and justice staff; and for funders and institutions thinking about how such partnerships are held.

[2] The Learning team at FACT is Rachel Mason, Ashleigh Sands, Neil Winterburn and Lucía Arias.

Those coming from social science traditions will find that some of what is described here sits close to what they already know and value, and some of it asks for a different kind of attention. Those coming from arts practice may likewise find familiar commitments in criminology, alongside habits of critical attention to power, language and representation that we found useful to think with. Taken together, participatory arts practice and participatory social science have developed much of their thinking in parallel, and there is real work to be done in bringing them into sustained conversation. This resource is an invitation to that conversation. It is particularly attentive to what transdisciplinary practice requires. Which we have learned is not always or simply the exchange of methods across fields, but the slower, more demanding work of allowing disciplines to genuinely shape one another.

This partnership was built on a belief that this kind of exchange has something important to contribute, both to how research is done and to how creative practice understands itself. We hope this resource carries that belief forward into new hands and new contexts.

How to use this resource

The resource is structured as a series of insights, each drawing on the reflections of different people and roles involved across our work together. You do not need to read it from beginning to end. You might find it more useful to move to whatever feels most relevant to where you are in your own practice or thinking, and to return to other sections as your questions develop. The individual quotes are part of our end of the programme evaluation.

One role in this resource operates a little differently from the rest. Dr Emma Murray served as FACT's Criminologist in Residence, and her position was always a particular one as translator between worlds and sectors, critical friend, and at the same time a full member of the Learning team. At the close of each section, Emma reflects on what that learning meant from inside the residency: where criminology and participatory arts met in shared values and practices, where our institutional structures pulled against each other, and what each of us took from the encounter. She draws on the criminologies that helped her think alongside the work, offered as one lens among several rather than an interpretation of it.

1 Beyond gatekeeping. Local prison media practitioner & Private sector creative strategies manager.

We begin with our peers from the criminal justice system who we worked with during different projects within *Resolution*. Dave McAlley is a prison officer and community lead, though he is much more than that at HMP Altcourse; during our time working with him he led the radio programme and the bee and bird keeping programmes. Sarah Hartley comes from an arts background and has long-term experience of running educational programmes in prisons, and currently leads on Novus's[3] creative strategy nationally, having worked with multiple artists on projects aimed at the community and public-facing work.

Their insights are a practical recollection of what is important to keep in mind when producing art in this context. Most of them may cross over from your own experiences as social scientists and community practitioners, but it is worth reminding ourselves of the importance of trusting the creative process, and of creating relationships of trust that allow for not knowing where the artistic process will lead – letting it follow its course without creating more stress.

Insight 1. *Clarity of direction and aligned intention.*

At the beginning of any collaboration, it is key to develop a shared understanding and valuing of the project. In Sarah's words:

> *"I think initially from the conversations that we had around what the project would be, there was that real, I suppose, alignment in terms of the intent. So for me, that's really important that it's that flexibility to work towards a shared goal."*

This is usually a combination of showing up, adapting to time constraints and navigating the very complex ecosystem that is the prison, constantly affected by the individual experiences of the imprisoned participants and by the institution itself, while maintaining a conversation that focuses on the art making:

> *"I thought that there was a real openness to understanding people's perspectives in the room and that then informing the approach, which is really interesting. Yeah, that empathy and understanding and time to, I suppose, get to know each person's place in the project contributed to the outcome. But again, it's that investment in time that I found quite important, but also obviously that led to the output at the end."*
> **Sarah Hartley**

Throughout, there is a difficult balance to strike between letting the work develop organically and remaining true to its aim. As Sarah shares:

> *"It's that clarity of direction, because especially with the projects, I understand how things organically develop, but then we are within a space where it isn't always open and are very much relying on the culture, so it can be quite difficult to change the parameters, especially when you start a project. We're doing this and now we want to do this - sharing an intent of a project and then shifting it doesn't sit comfortably because it becomes more complex. Stating the vagueness (referring to the fact that the project starts without a clear idea of what it will become) at the start, with what parameters you have set and the ones you don't quite know, but still trying to cover all bases of possibilities."*

[3] Novus provides prison education and training services in almost 50 locations across England and Wales.

Insight 2. *Trust the creative process, and be attentive to how things evolve and people respond.*

Start with a shared agreement of the goal to allow the creative vision to develop:

> *"It's really important to have that alignment that I just referred to, that sense of a shared goal and being assured that collectively and collaboratively we're working towards that with the people who are involved in the project. I think once that understanding is in place and all the logistics are agreed, and for me, it's about trusting in the creative process. But I do think it's really important, especially because we're working within the wider sector, that shared goal for me is the centre of the work, because then, the creativity and how things evolve and how people respond to them, work with the artist, draw, and that's the exciting thing."*
> **Sarah Hartley**

> *"Just roll with it. I have, working in this environment, I've got very, very few expectations. I know what I'd like. Do we always get what I'd like? No. We could have been in the middle of doing something, and then suddenly they turn around and say they're not coming in anymore, and everything just stops. So it's nice to get to the end."*
> **Dave McAlley**

In terms of how things evolve is interesting, for what the art gallery might view as different projects, it is one long-term collaboration for the prison staff. As Dave shares:

> *"Even though, I mean, I don't think of it as an end. I don't think of it as three different projects. For me, it's just all one. You know, it's working with a group of people who are passionate about what they do, and, you know, and I say it's nice to see another way of looking at things."*

Depending on the project, you may get unexpected engagement or go through sessions not quite understanding how the artist is going to bring it all together. In Dave's own words:

> *"So there was this project, for example, I looked at these sessions and sat there, and I'm thinking, where does this all come together? How is it going to work? And then I remember, and I'll never, ever forget, when I went to the gallery and I saw it, I just filled up, you know, it was like, it brought it all together for me. But that's down to her as the artist, for doing that, because art touches you in so many different ways, doesn't it? And that surprised me."*

Insight 3. *Build trust, and let curiosity grow from it. When people feel trusted, they are more willing to participate and to keep showing up.*

> *"We spoke after you had left, and we've been recording, and we go, what was that about? I have no idea. We just keep, and they keep on going, you know, because I think it's because one of the reasons we carry on working together is because we trust you. We know you're not going to make us look stupid or embarrass us in any way. You know, it's respect on both sides. And that's why. No, let's keep going. Let's just see where this journey's going to take us all."*

What Dave mentions here was built during many years of showing up to do work, or just to check in, responding to the complexities of access to the prison with all the flexibility an art organisation is capable of. It would not be fair not to recognise the prison staff believing in the work and engaging with the participants in between sessions, and the officers participating themselves in the workshops, sharing stories just as the rest.

Insight 4. *Working across sectors brings its own parameters and tensions, keep them in mind.*

The art made inside the prison is shown in a gallery, not only in the prison itself. So, what happens when the work reaches the gallery? There is usually a shift in audience which raises the question of how we create the right context for the work to be seen. In Sarah's own words, these are the questions to bear in mind:

> *"For me, anything in that public space is about evoking conversation. So I suppose my hope was that there would be a level of curiosity to encourage people to explore what it was about."*

> *"I suppose in a system like the criminal justice system, where there are parameters and frameworks and very clear, I don't know, roots for things or policies or whatever to have something so abstract positioned against that. Again, for me, it's the question, who's the audience? How do you get them into that space? It's something that I've questioned and thought about for a number of artistic projects. People who have galleries, fantastic galleries on the doorsteps, have never been in because they always feel that it's for the elite and not for them. Or they might have been on a school trip, but it's not what their families do. And for me, that's important. So from a professional capacity and a personal capacity, I get it. But then again, in the context of the work, who's the audience?"*

Reflections from a Criminologist in Residence

What Dave and Sarah describe here is not incidental to this resource. It sits at the centre of it – in who gets named as a knowledge holder, in what the tools we share actually carry with them, and in what kind of time this work asks for that funding rarely gives. I want to sit with that learning, and honour who and what this kind of work actually takes. What stays with me most is how much of it depends on Dave and Sarah's trust, continuity and judgement, which make the work possible at all. They stay with it after the project team has moved on, hold relationships across years rather than funding cycles, and carry an institutional memory that neither the university nor the art gallery can replicate.

That makes me want to sit with a further question: what are the resources and frameworks needed for this type of project? They are not strictly the Learning team's, and not something we can claim purely for research. They came from the space between the two, shaped by people like Dave and Sarah as much as by us, and I think that origin asks something specific of anyone who wants to use them. Back and Puwar's (2012) work on live methods, and Conquergood's (2013) on performative knowledge, offer a language for what these tools might be doing beyond their practical function, and I find myself returning to that language here, as a way of understanding what it takes to hold space well enough for someone to check in honestly, or for a group to be listened to over time.

I think this points to something I am still finding my way through in this project as I am learning to facilitate a space rather than simply research it, and sitting in the gap between those two ways of being present. Facilitating asks for a different relationship to tools, and to people, than researching does, and it is not a role we are especially used to naming when we talk about these collaborations, or when we carry something like a listening map or a check-in document into another context and expect it to work the same way there.

Dave describes sitting through sessions without knowing where they are going, then being moved, unexpectedly, by what the work becomes in the art gallery. That gap feels like more than a personal account of surprise; it points to a kind of not-knowing we will return to. Sarah's question, of who gets to enter a gallery and on what terms, sits close to questions criminology has long asked about access to universities and other institutions, and about who has learned, over years, through the slow accumulation of exclusions large and small, that those spaces were never really built with them in mind.

What I take from this is a sense that longer timelines and relational investment matter more than we tend to acknowledge, and are perhaps essential to this kind of collaboration. What I'm less sure of is whether other spaces, working within very different constraints, could make room for that. Participatory research has long argued for something similar: that trust with communities, and with the gatekeepers who make access possible in the first place, is not built through a single act of outreach but sustained over time, relationally, and often invisibly. Public criminology more broadly has made the case for exactly this kind of long-term partnership. Yet academia is not always built to hold it. Funding cycles are short, outputs are expected on a timeline that rarely matches the pace of trust, and the infrastructure to sustain relationships with partners and gatekeepers is often missing.

One of the questions *Imagining Possible Futures* set out to ask was what actually happens in the relationship between coproduction, research and arts-informed knowledge creation, not as an abstract claim but as something lived. I want to be careful about what Dave and Sarah's account can carry here. What they describe most directly is not coproduction as a method but a way of being in uncertainty: sitting through sessions without knowing where they lead, having "very, very few expectations," starting with a stated vagueness about what the project will become.

What makes it something closer to coproduction is what they say the not-knowing rests on. For Sarah, it is a shared intent agreed at the outset, and then an openness to people's perspectives in the room that goes on to shape the approach. For Dave, it is respect running in both directions: a trust that no one will be made to look foolish, which is the reason the staff keep saying yes to work they cannot yet picture.

The not-knowing, in other words, is held mutually. Direction is set in the room rather than in advance, and it is the trust between the people in that room, built over years of showing up, that makes sitting with vagueness possible rather than threatening. This is the kind of not-knowing I flagged earlier: not the absence of a plan, but a shared willingness to let the work decide, underwritten by relationships strong enough to bear it. This makes roles like Dave and Sarah's indispensable in this type of project

2 The artistic vision. Melanie Crean

We now turn to the reflections shared by one of the artists. Melanie is an interdisciplinary artist and socially engaged arts practitioner who developed a six-year project with FACT. Her insights focus on what the process of art creation requires, in particular, the support an artist needs to be able to do their work. She offers some valuable thoughts on how, as an artist, it can be useful to engage with the prison system.

Insight 1. *Slow, sustained relationships, maintained before, around and beyond the artwork.*

The responsibility of the artist ends up being shared with the learning team, the prison officers and the participants. In her words:

> *"It became a 'we' very quickly. It wasn't just me, as the artist, coming in and making something on my own. That would never have worked, because I was coming from a different place, culturally as well as geographically. The project depended on the relationships that FACT had already built, and on all of us working together."*

Melanie calls this the "ground game":

> *"FACT's ongoing relational work with local partners was critical. I think of this as the 'ground game', the work of building and maintaining relationships that made everything else possible. Over several years, the FACT team developed relationships with prison staff and justice-sector workers across the country. That allowed me, as an artist, to enter into an existing community of trust and then extend that community to the incarcerated participants I was working with directly. Socially engaged art has to work this way. From a trusted community, you can build poetry, but generally not the other way around."*

> *"This kind of work becomes collective quite quickly. You're trying to create the conditions where a group of people can make something substantive together that none of you could have made alone."*

Insight 2. *Start from a position of not knowing what is going on: don't arrive with fixed expectations.*

Once you introduce yourself and your ideas, as mentioned in Section 1, check the responses and the interest that participants are showing, and let that shape what happens next. In her experience:

> *"Every context is different, so I always need to begin from an acknowledged not knowing. There are questions of positionality, particularly when you're entering a community or institution that isn't your own. I can introduce myself and say, 'This is roughly what I've been invited here to do. Does any of this interest you? And if it does, how might we shape it together?' People need to be able to opt in or not. The project develops from there, through what people bring to it, rather than from me arriving with a fully formed idea of what should happen."*

Insight 3. *Question the system: starting with yourself.*

It is important to position yourself in the context, and remain aware of where you come from. Here, Melanie talks about the moments where as a collaborator, she questions or challenges back power relationships and structures:

> *"Part of 'unmaking' that we referenced in the project's title, A Machine to Unmake You, was not only thinking about the individual, but beginning to question some of the power relationships within the institutions around us. That also meant looking at myself. I started thinking about how these structures operate in my own life, in my university in New York, and in the organisations I work with, including how I work with other people.*
>
> *When you're thinking deeply about a project over a long period of time, it stops being something contained within an artwork or exhibition. The questions start following you into your everyday life. For me, the project became as much about examining how I work, how I share authorship, and how I relate to people as it was about making something that would eventually appear in a gallery."*

Insight 4. *A revolving council of people with direct lived experience.*

This is something we did not have the capacity to do in this project. Part of the work was shown to selected people with lived experience in the criminal justice system. We were able to show the works pre-exhibitions in the following projects in the programme. Their role would be to give reactions, prevent harm, and have a say in the final work alongside the artist.

> *"One thing I'd consider doing differently, particularly for organisations that don't have people on staff who share the lived experience of long-term project participants, is to establish an ongoing advisory group with that direct knowledge and perspective. If a project claims to centre lived experience, and to work through a 'design with' rather than 'design for' approach, then people with that experience need a meaningful way to respond to the work as it develops, particularly when it isn't possible to remain in contact with the original participants.*
>
> *I imagine this less as a fixed group than as a kind of evolving council, with roles that different people might move in and out of. At a minimum, they could identify something in the project that might cause harm or trigger trauma if the work is presented publicly. But ideally their role would go much further than preventing harm. They would contribute ideas, question decisions, and help shape how the work is shared publicly."*

Insight 5. *Audience feedback.*

This can differ from what is sometimes labelled community arts — where the artists and organisers are usually part of the community itself, and the audience is largely the people who made the work — though the line between the two is not always clear-cut. Here Melanie refers to drawing on the experience of the gallery team who spend time with the exhibition and the audience:

> *"For this kind of work, I think there is another important role for the gallery team: to engage directly with people coming into the exhibition, have conversations with them, and help connect their own experiences to what they encounter in the work.*
>
> *Participatory art has an unusual relationship with its audience. Often the most important audience is the community that made the work together. Once the work enters a gallery, other visitors may appreciate it aesthetically without necessarily feeling that they have a relationship to it. Conversation can change that. If gallery staff are there to engage with visitors, the encounter can shift from 'this is a project about these other people' towards questions that connect the work to their own experiences, assumptions, and lives."*

Reflections from a Criminologist in Residence

Melanie recognises that none of this was ever the work of one person or one discipline. She calls this the "ground game" and it is relational, often invisible, and held by people rarely named as knowledge holders. Her observation that you can build poetry from a trusted community, but not the other way around, holds for research too.

Beginning from a space of not knowing came less easily to me. I was trained to treat uncertainty as a problem to be solved, and for a long time I apologised for what I could not yet articulate. Watching Melanie open with "Does any of this interest you?" taught me that not knowing is a method in its own right, provided it rests on shared intention and relationships strong enough to hold it.

Her insistence that questioning the system starts with yourself followed me home. During one of the workshops, my instinct was to frame and theorise what had not yet happened. Working on this project turned my attention back onto my own practice of how I share authorship, how my university measures what I produce, and who is credited when knowledge is made together.

I share her call for an evolving council of people with lived experience, which we did not have the capacity to build. It matters for research as much as for art. When people imagine alongside us, those with access to resources take on an obligation to carry the work forward and remain answerable to it. Otherwise, even well-intentioned projects risk becoming another form of extraction.

Finally, Melanie's point about audiences echoes what the Learning team taught me: curation is an ethical practice as much as an aesthetic one. Within an art space, the conversations Melanie introduces, moving visitors from "this is about other people" towards their own lives and assumptions, are close to what I have hoped criminology might do in public, and have rarely managed through argument alone.

Some questions stay with me: *What role does a researcher play when they are not setting the direction? Is presence that is sustained and attentive, but not directive, a legitimate contribution in its own right?* I have not settled these, and I am not sure they should be settled so much as kept in view.

3 Holding the work. Learning team at FACT.

This section features the insights of the Learning team at FACT. There are four people in the current Learning team, and we talk to each other a lot. It has become something of a running joke at the organisation – our reflective time and our habit of discussing things in all their complexity – though this probably just comes with the territory of participatory and situated arts practices. Speaking / reflecting together has helped us attune our ways of working – and our instincts – and, more importantly, trust each other over the past few years.

Across all the experiences gathered in this publication, one thread runs through everything as a shared learning: being transparent and open enough to trust the artistic process.

Insight 1. *The Learning team is rarely just the Learning team.*

Artists, collaborators and participants become key parts of the team, "honorary members", as we spend time together. This was not something we learned inside the prison; it is simply how we work across the whole learning programme, with artists, educators, curators, and with social scientists and academics too.

If you arrive from a social science background, this is perhaps the first thing to unlearn: the team is not a fixed unit you join and then study from. Membership is porous, and it extends to the people you might otherwise think of as participants or subjects. Working this way means recognising that different kinds of skill and knowledge are equally valid – and it asks something of you in return. It calls for a level of transparency about your own structures and decision-making that can feel exposing at first, and that we ourselves had to grow into slowly.

Much of this happens in the unglamorous time. Accompanying an artist through a project means a lot of downtime together: waiting to be let into a prison, debriefing after a session, sitting with the work at its various stages. It is in that downtime, rather than in the formal moments, that the team actually forms and the intersection between the art organisation and the people it works with starts to make sense.

Insight 2. *Listening for the purpose of really understanding, not to respond.*

One of the threads that runs through this work is a particular quality of listening: receiving before responding. Rather than shaping an answer while the other person is still talking, we try to take in what is being said first, and let understanding come before reply. You must receive before you can respond – without that receptivity, it is hard to know what would be meaningful to give back.

This is less about technique than about orientation. It means setting aside, for a moment, the urge to fix, interpret or conclude, or bring the institutional agenda, and stay with what is actually in front of you. It is what we describe as listening for the purpose of listening rather than listening to answer. This does not take away from the fact that part of our work is also to help varied audiences and stakeholders understand and connect with art – the two exist alongside each other, rather than in competition.

Importantly, this kind of listening does not happen in one place or in one mode. It moves across many overlapping contexts – conversations between the team, time spent with artists and participants, moments in the prison, exchanges with collaborators and staff – each feeding into the others. Listening in one setting shapes how we listen in the next, and gradually it becomes less a thing we do and more a way we work.

This way of listening also supports the art creation and it is part of it. The conversations, exchanges and relationships built through the projects do not just happen alongside the artwork, they end up inside it, shaping what it becomes. Our roles, as artists and facilitators, is to hold that space while it happens: to stay attentive to what participants are sharing, and to help translate it into the work. For example, a participant might mention a story or a moment from their life during a session. Rather than treating this as separate from "the work," the artist listens and holds it – and it then could be brought into the final piece, either as an element of the work itself or as part of its narrative.

If you come to this from research, it is worth noticing that some academic training can orient you toward the response – toward interpretation, analysis, the move from observation to conclusion. This isn't true everywhere: some disciplines and some researchers are trained instead to sit with ambiguity, to observe without rushing to explain. This way of listening asks you to hold some of that off, at least for a while, and to receive before you frame.

Insight 3. *Bringing work with participants to the centre of the organisation, and bringing the organisation with you.*

One of the hardest things we learned is that this work cannot sit at the edges. Putting participants at the centre means creating spaces where they feel comfortable to share their stories, and a "safe" space for the artist to work with those stories in ways that explore and honour the dignity of everyone involved. But it also means asking the rest of the organisation to move with you, and that is not something you can take for granted. In our experience, the organisation (FACT) was structurally ready to take a programme like this on board, but it was the relational aspect, the everyday conversations with our peers that created that move.

Art production runs on fixed timelines and decisions that have to be made, and time often works "against" this kind of care. What made our work possible was not that we won an argument, but that the organisation trusted us. Our job, again and again, was to ask for that trust and then to justify it – to make the case for a different type of production, one in which the institution listens to the individuals working within it and prioritises what is best for the projects over what is most efficient. As one of us put it:

> *"We found different points where we agreed on creating moments to listen, or to stop. It's very difficult, because art production doesn't allow you to do it. With the justice system, this space is different. As well as asking an artist to put on an exhibition, they have the responsibility of representing these participants – they deserve these moments."*

For anyone coming from research, this is the part that often sits outside the job description. You can run a careful, ethical process with participants and still find that the work stalls when it meets the institution's timelines and priorities. Centring it is not only an artistic or curatorial decision – it is relational work, asking colleagues across the organisation to move with you, and that trust to be shown.

Insight 4. *The duty of care.*

A well-known quality of community arts is that anything can affect a session before it even starts, from the taxi journey onward. Inside a prison this is heightened, because participants are subject to decisions that shape their day in significant ways, including, for example, whether they will get to see their significant others. With the artists, our care looks different: checking in, and supporting them through a process in which they may not have all the access to participants that they need.

This works on three levels for us: care to the work itself, where we need a shared, agreed understanding of what we are doing in that space as a Learning team from an art gallery; care to the participants, in terms of the ethics and ways of working with people in prison; and care to the artists, through the brief, checking in, and support offered throughout the process.

It is important to highlight how to act for the needs of the participants while working on a project that ends with an exhibition in the art gallery. Following on Melanie's suggestion of having a council of people with lived experience, these are our suggestions to keep participants involved during the limited time you might have with them: 1) Always explain everything about the artwork as it develops, 2) Be transparent about decision making: change of plans, dates or conceptual ideas, and talk them through bringing as much visual material as possible and, 3) Keep them up to date with all the information about how the exhibition and the programme will be communicated - this required a lot more communications work, which may have helped with the relational aspect and the trust.

Reflections from a Criminologist in Residence

What I take from this section is that holding is different from leading. It is quieter, harder to see, the sustained work that makes leading possible at all, and it rarely produces a moment, an output, or a clear before and after. What stands out is how much of this section names things a research project rarely gets to build in explicitly, porous team membership, listening before framing, and a kind of relational care that so many of us negotiate alongside our institution's timelines. What would it take, I wonder, for that kind of holding to be recognised as work in its own right, rather than as the invisible scaffolding around it?

Listening is central to that holding, and we would argue it is a practice in its own right, not invisible scaffolding around the real work. At first, our listening was shaped by our own agendas. We were present in the room but still composing, still gathering what we needed, still planning what to do with what we heard. Slowly, the work asked for a different kind of presence, one that could stay with what had been said without reaching for what to do with it. We were not the first to find our way here. Yvonne Jewkes (2012) taught us that the feelings prison research stirs in us are not something to set aside but a source of understanding. Alison Liebling (1999) reminded us that fieldwork carries a moral weight and asks something of those who undertake it. Narrative criminology showed us that the way people tell their own stories is itself a form of knowledge (Presser and Sandberg, 2015), and Shadd Maruna (2001) that, in the telling, people can begin to make good and to author a self beyond the one punishment assigns them. Carol Gilligan and colleagues (2003) offered ways of listening for the many voices within a single account. Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2021) showed that immersion and reflexivity are the ground of good listening, not a hindrance to it. From participatory art, Pablo Helguera (2011) gave us another vocabulary for the ethics of being with others. The exchange ran both ways. The Learning team's listening practice showed us how to live what Jewkes and Liebling describe, and in return criminology offered the team language to name and defend their practice within the organisation (see Lucía, Section 5, Insight 2). It was in holding these together, rather than choosing between them, that we began to hear new things.

Bringing participants to the centre, and bringing the organisation with you, is a structural achievement rather than a personal one. What made it possible was not one team's good intentions. It was an organisation that had built a habit of trusting the Learning team enough to slow down when the work needed it, again and again, over years. That trust reached beyond the Learning team to exhibition producers, communications colleagues and Visitor Services, all of whom shaped how the work was experienced. I am not sure universities, including my own, have built the same habit, and the reason is not a lack of academics who value slowness. Advocates of slow scholarship have long argued for care, collectivity and unhurried time as the conditions of good work (Mountz et al., 2015; Berg and Seeber, 2016), and others have shown how metrics and audit in the neoliberal university press for outcomes before they have had time to emerge (Gill, 2009). The difficulty lies less with academics than with the measures we are asked to work within. But the learning ran both ways. Bringing art gallery's structures and a university's structures together meant each institution came to see something about its own clock. The university saw what becomes possible when outcomes are not named too soon. The art gallery found in its research alignment what Lucía calls "the excuse, or the opportunity" to push for reflective time it might not otherwise have claimed (see Section 5, Insight 4). This feels like an institutional capacity rather than a disposition. I do not have a clear answer for what it would take to grow it in a university, only the question, offered honestly, of what it might mean to try.

4 Holding the frame. The wider team at FACT

We turn now to the people who help us bring the work to its audience in an art gallery setting: the people who make the exhibition, market them and welcome visitors to the gallery.

Up to this point, much of the learning has centred on what happens in the room with participants and artists. Once an artwork enters the gallery, a different set of colleagues join the responsibility of presenting it well: exhibition producers shaping how an exhibition is experienced, marketing and communications colleagues working on how it is framed and described, and the Visitor Services team who are often the first people an audience meets.

We found language particularly challenging, as it was changing. We tried as much as possible to listen to how the participants talk about themselves, to safeguard them, while also thinking about everyone else who is affected when a project like this is presented publicly. Collaborating with a social scientist helped us explore that language in more depth. But we're still figuring out, project after project, how differently the word "production" can be understood — for a researcher it might mean something closer to data and process, for an artist something closer to form and feeling. The exhibition wasn't trying to resolve that difference; it was a poetic invitation, not a research space.

Exhibition Production

Charlotte Horn is the Senior Exhibition Producer at FACT, we have produced four exhibitions presenting artworks, created with participants within prison.

Insight 1. *Recognise the pressure and the responsibility.*

You have to listen carefully to the artist and those who have been working directly with the participants at the prison, and make informed decisions about what is and how it is shared with the audience. This includes balancing the participatory elements of the project and how they are coming together.

In Charlotte's words, you have to think about your role while the project is taking shape:

> *"It was a lot of pressure in terms of thinking about my role as a producer in taking all of this learning that you guys have been doing with the artist and with the participants, that having its own life as a huge project that I know we're only showing a part of in the gallery, but then also trying to communicate, almost decide with the artist, what points we need to share with the audience to explain why we're doing it, why it is in a gallery and how to balance that… The elements, those participatory elements with the artistic root of it.*

It was really helpful to go on that listening journey and to take it as a learning opportunity of how you bring that balance into a public presentation and how you bring that I'm not an expert in this, but I'm listening to all of these different aspects that are coming together, that are coming from the things that I know contextually within the prison or within the work that's been going on in there to then going, what do I know about the project as it's taking shape?"

For her it was also interesting to reflect on what you do and don't share, what needs to be shared with an audience, and what doesn't.

"There are things that should just be for that space that you create with the participants that don't have to be shared, but that will influence the work."

Insight 2. *It is an artistic, poetic presentation, not a project presentation.*

The art gallery experience is capturing a feeling, a collective decision or a moment in the story:

"Whereas in the gallery it is much more capturing a feeling or a moment or a collective decision on something. I think that, for me, has been the most interesting thing as an exhibition maker."

We are pushing the artist's vision and ambition, surrounded by a dissemination programme around it, which can be more discursive or academic:

"But I think it says something that being able to produce an artwork like this, it's not a show and tell situation. It's more of allowing the audience to just tap into something that they might not necessarily recognise, but it does slightly alter their frame of mind. Rather than it being like, we've made a documentary about how we did this workshop situation for six weeks or whatever, it's more like we've, the artist has identified something within all of that and thought about how they want to situate you in it when you went to the gallery space. That, for me, was probably the most interesting thing."

This is how Charlotte describes what the exhibition does:

"It's not this situation where you're being told what happened. You're allowed to just sit in it and feel it a little bit, which I really like about the works. It's nice that you can have so many different outcomes, but one of them is perhaps a bit more abstract."

A poetic representation does not resolve into findings, you have to trust that the artwork can hold knowledge without translating into analysis.

Marketing and Communications

Jess Fairclough is the Head of Marketing & Communications at FACT, and we worked closely with her and the Marketing and Communications team to introduce artworks and dissemination programmes to different audiences.

Insight 1. *Making humanity visible, without making it all about the prison.*

The visibility of identity here is very different from other participatory projects. There is the safeguarding and the safety to consider, but also the question of how participants are represented within an artwork. These are groups who are largely invisible in society and who, at the same time, carry a stigma – so the work of representing them has to hold both things at once: bringing them into view, without letting the prison become the whole of who they are.

In her words:

"Visibility of identity was the biggest thing in terms of what made it different from other projects and the protection of that, not only from a very practical point of view and a safety point of view, but also in terms of how they want to be represented. As people, not just as a person that happens to be in prison as well."

She adds:

"Identity is such a core part and a unique part of the project in a way of which those participants are invisible from society, and also there is the stigma around that as well."

Each element of the project needs to be thought through in terms of identity:

"I feel like for Resolution in general, when we're talking about the project, when we're talking about the artwork, so anything that's connected to a multi-layer project that works with the justice system and where the participants are in prison, then there has got to be a really core way of how they want to be represented in that project. I guess that has very much been supported and steered by the artist and their conversations with them. It comes through an artistic approach, but also in your guys' methodology and how you present people in a project and the humanity behind that."

Insight 2. *Working through multiple layers.*

A project ends up as an artwork, but it travels through several layers to get there. The work itself happens with participants in prison, within the justice system. What makes it to the gallery is through an artistic approach, shaped and steered by the artist and their conversations with the participants, but also through our own decisions and ways of working: how we choose to present people. In this case, humanity was the core.

It is important to clarify that when we talk about "the stories of the participants", we mean this in a general sense — these are people, a community we have a responsibility to represent with care. Marketing does not work directly with participants, nor does it produce the artwork. There are two distinct narratives at play: marketing contextualises the work for audiences, while the artwork carries its own, separate narrative.

Jess talks about adapting to the length of the project, and the different moments in politics and society:

> *"It was this constant understanding that, because it is a multi-year project, not to set the key messages and the 'why' we are doing it at the beginning, and to then just make those concrete all the way through. There had to be this flexibility around it because the nature of things changed. Also people's attitudes towards that when we think about being presented in a public space, what's happening in the news cycle at the time when we come to show the exhibition, if there was something that was happening. I know we looked at that from a risk point of view as well"*

Here is a description of the process:

> *"There is this very sensitive messaging at the beginning to ensure that we're laying the foundations of trust with the audience as well, to be like, you can trust us as an institution that we have fantastic ethics and that we have thought about this and this has been done carefully and in a considerate way, and we've grown with these artists for this reason. You have to start in that level of trust, so then there isn't room for misunderstanding or misconception later on. Then having to then retroactively talk about that is if you've lost that person at the initial phase of trust, it's very hard to get that back."*

It is important to think about the big responsibility of a thoughtful communication campaign:

> *"A lot of our responsibility in a project is making sure that it's communicated true to what the artist intended, and in this case, the participants. And I think the best thing you could do is just to make sure that you don't let that advocacy slip into what is the story that people want to tell themselves or want to hear."*

An important lesson which resonates with the complexity mentioned in previous sections:

> *"I think in a project that is deeply complex and is trying to shift people's perspectives and narratives, you have to really remain strong to those narratives that are trying to be reset and not slip into the things that are already readymade because that just makes it more palatable or easier for a narrative."*

Gallery Visitor Services

Joan Burnett is the Visitor Services Manager at FACT. We worked closely with her and her team to give them all the background needed to facilitate these projects in the art gallery. We aim to work with Visitor Services in as much dialogue as possible — the time they spend with the work and their insights from knowing the audience are among the things we value most, as do the artists.

Insights 1. *The meaning of Resolution for both audience and participants.*

Facilitating this type of work requires a person-centred approach, thinking about all those affected by this lived experience, and being open to conversations.

> *"For me, it meant the humanizing of people who are often discounted because they've, in the eyes of society, they've transgressed, and it might be to a greater or lesser degree.*
>
> *I think people forget that people are people until they see an artwork made by people. So for me, the biggest thing about the whole program is giving a voice to people that everyone discounts. And we all do, you know, even the more saintly of us. Do we really think about what goes on after the cell door closes? No, I don't think we really do. And until you watch a drama or see an artwork or read an account by somebody. I think it's very easy to live a very sheltered life and not really think about what that is like.*
>
> *I think for those men who've met artists and been listened to and had a chance to express something about themselves, I really hope that that's been a lasting experience for them. It's not a panacea, it's not going to change their life necessarily, but it might do, and it might change a little bit of it, and it might change a little bit of how they feel. So for me, watching audiences engage with that work is very interesting. When we risk-assess, you quite often think about the negative things people might say, but actually that's been quite small and overwhelmingly positive from people". [Melanie's and Ain's][4] really made people think because it felt a bit like a prison environment. It kind of made people – both of those works really in that show[s], they took you inside that environment and showed it to you a bit, and I think people were interested."*

Insight 2. *It is not what it takes, it is what it gives.*

Trusting who will facilitate an exhibition is central to this process, and engagement here looks like a deep connection with the audience.

> *"I think it's not what it takes, I think it's what it gives. It does take energy and it does take compassion and I think it's a huge trust given to us to look after that kind of work or any of the works. One of my staff from years and years ago said, "What I like about working at FACT is the fact that we are just trusted to do it." And I think you have to be able to trust the people who are going to interpret that work for the public."*

[4] *A Machine to Unmake You (M2UY)* (2029- 2024), by artist Melanie Crean in collaboration with incarcerated veterans and staff at HMP Altcourse. *Four (2024)*, by artist Ain Bailey in collaboration with imprisoned men at HMP Buckley Hall and their families.

This is an approach to engagement built on knowledge that should be peer-led — meaning Visitor Services staff sharing and teaching that knowledge to one another, rather than it being passed down solely from a single expert source. Joan suggests a peer-led exchange approach:

> *"If this work were shown again: passing on the knowledge, one gallery's Visitor Services team briefing others to prepare them for the work and what would happen in the gallery."*

Learning directly from the Visitor Services team, who have spent time with these kinds of artworks and their audiences would be useful to anyone thinking about showcasing art made with people who have experience in the criminal justice system.

She talks about the different reactions to the artwork, and she refers to this specific project which opened a river of comments, the equivalent of a physical weight and a psychic one.

> *"I was fascinated by Amartey's[5], which had such a deep emotional resonance for us and for visitors. I never looked after anything that made me feel like that; I've looked after a lot of artwork, some of which over the years has moved me very, very deeply, but there's something about that, it's still in my dreams. So many people in the prison community took part in it, the officers… That they were in that artwork too, they're also people, they also have challenges, that's a challenging environment."*

Insight 3. *This type of work gives people a space to talk about things.*

> *"The conversations we had with people – especially those who had been in prison themselves—stayed with us. People would say to us, "I have been in this," or that they had family members in prison. This work gives people licence to talk about things they might never otherwise talk about. These projects are windows: an emotional window that makes people think about what that might feel like."*

This raises a question worth naming more carefully – not just whether art organisations should do this kind of work, but what it actually means for an organisation to question itself in this way. For us, that has meant things like being a local institution hosting work made with a local prison, or thinking harder about what participation really requires of us, rather than assuming we already know. It inevitably raises the question of what art galleries are for as public spaces – and part of the answer has meant letting our own language shift, adapting to how participants talk about themselves rather than imposing our own terms.

This links to a final reflection for us all, about the role art galleries play in producing and exhibiting projects like this: shouldn't art organisations be asking these questions of themselves – reaching, as some might put it, toward communities that public institutions don't always reach?

[5] *Chainmail 4: Silent Knight (2025),* by artist Amartey Golding in collaboration with imprisoned men and prison officers at HMP Altcourse.

Reflections from a Criminologist in Residence

I keep returning to the fact that Charlotte, Jess and Joan are not thinking about research, coproduction or knowledge creation in the terms this resource has been using. They are thinking about an audience, and about what it takes to let that audience meet the work honestly. Taken together, their reflections sit closer to public criminology than anything else in this collection (Loader and Sparks, 2010), though none of them would likely call it that. They also speak to concerns in cultural and visual criminology. Jess's warning against "readymade" narratives echoes cultural criminology's long critique of how crime and punishment are represented (Ferrell, Hayward and Young, 2015). Charlotte's understanding about what not to show connects with visual criminology's attention to the ethics of images of suffering and punishment (Carrabine, 2012). Here, as elsewhere, the art gallery team were not borrowing from these literatures but arriving at the same commitments by their own routes and practice.

Public criminology has long argued that speaking beyond the academy is not a single act of translation at the end of a project: a press release, a summary, a plain language version of a finding. It is an ongoing responsibility, held before, during and after the sharing itself (Loader and Sparks, 2010). Jess describes something very close to that when she talks about laying foundations of trust with an audience early, and how hard that trust is to rebuild if it is lost. Charlotte describes it in what the team and the artists choose not to share, deciding, carefully, and often in conversation with participants themselves, what belongs to the space made with them and what does not need to travel further. Joan describes it as something closer to a duty of care extended outward, to the audience as much as the participants, thinking about what a visitor carries away and what they might need support to sit with.

We tend to think about dissemination as something separate from the ethics of a project, a final stage rather than a continuous relationship. What this section suggests, I think, is that sharing is not a neutral act of communication but a form of care in its own right, one that asks for the same attentiveness, humility and ongoing negotiation that the earlier sections describe in the room with participants. Curation, in this sense, is not a matter of taste or presentation but rather where care either survives contact with an audience or does not.

For our own question, about coproduction, research and arts-informed knowledge creation, I think this points to something we have not fully answered yet. If coproduction is genuinely about creating knowledge together, then the sharing of that knowledge, its curation, cannot be treated as a separate task from the relational work that produced it in the first place. It needs to be held with the same care, by people who understand what is actually at stake in how something is framed for an audience who was not in the room, and, where possible, by the participants themselves, who have their own view on what should travel and what should not.

5 A final conversation. Emma Murray in dialogue with Lucía Arias.

We offer this conversation as a way of sharing some further learning — not just what we found to have in common, but what we each leave behind, and what we take with us in crossing into a discipline that is not our own. Epistemic trespass (Martínez, 2021; Murray et al, 2025), if we can call it that, is not resolved by good intentions; it has to be lived with, worked through, sometimes left unresolved. Where our disciplines will always be different is as much a part of this learning as where they met.

As we bring this learning partnership to a close, what stays with us is what was learned between two ways of working that do not always sit comfortably side by side. One is the participatory arts practice developed at FACT. The other is a critical criminology concerned with whose knowledge counts and what happens when the categories we bring turn out not to fit. By criminology here we mean a particular cluster: critical, cultural and public criminologies, alongside the participatory, narrative, convict and lived-experience criminologies that have asked whose knowledge counts. Criminology does not speak with one voice (see Insight 2), and much of it would not recognise itself in this work. Working together across a prison, an art gallery and a university, we found more common ground than we expected. We also found where our disciplines pulled apart, sometimes productively and sometimes not. Rather than resolving those differences into a single account, we set them out here as they were lived: a design problem worked through in real time. What follows are four insights, offered in dialogue rather than agreement. Neither of us claims the last word. This is provisional, situated learning, useful as one partnership's account rather than as a template for elsewhere.

Insight 1: *You can't name the outcomes at the start.*

Disciplines connected to the social sciences, and criminology among them, are often built to work outcomes out first — particularly with increasing impact agendas, where the proposal, the anticipated findings, the shape of the thing before the thing has happened, are all imagined in advance. Participatory arts practice does not always start from the same place. So we wanted to ask each other, honestly, where we were each coming from when this collaboration began, and what we learned by working together with very different understandings of uncertainty.

Lucía: *I would describe my role as a mix between storyteller and translator in between many worlds. However, as we said before this is not one person, we work collectively as a team, which allows different communications skills at different moments. This is why I use "we" throughout most of this dialogue.*

At the beginning of this process, all we knew was that we were producing an artwork, which would end up presented as an exhibition in the gallery. And maybe not even that, the decision to open the artwork to audiences as an exhibition was made after we started testing it out with other participatory projects at FACT. Through our conversations with Emma, we learnt most of the art made in prison is rarely shown in an art gallery, either following Community Arts approaches, where the artwork goes back to the community, or Socially Engaged Arts, which chooses a curatorial location based on the intention or inquiry of the work.

However, we are an art gallery, and even if we are aware of the access limitations for general people to visit art galleries, it is a big window that would introduce some of the experiences and poetic outcomes to a different audience. Let's also remember the importance of locality, this is Liverpool, a small city with two prisons, and this work was showcased in an art gallery in the city.

Through this process, we had to remain transparent with everyone involved, and find ways to explain that this is an artwork, and there will be an exhibition, and how we get there. I think Dave (prison officer and community lead) explains earlier in this resource: you have to trust the process. The unknowing requires an extra layer of ongoing communication, checking in, and staying in dialogue, at different levels, like bringing everyone on a journey: from participants, to prison officers, stakeholders, all the way to the prison director.

It requires buy-in from everyone involved, an open channel, and an art partner to adapt to needs as much as possible. Inside the art organisation, it also requires making space for those who lead strategically or programmatically to understand that the work takes the time it takes.

Emma: *I think I came into this wanting to know, roughly, where it was going. There was a certain pressure from my institution to be able to explain that. I had this quite ambitious business case that gestured at outcomes such as engagement, representation, skills and shifts in institutional cultures, because that's what I believed the work required, and I remember feeling, quite early on, actually anxious that I couldn't yet say what this collaboration was going to lead to.*

And that pressure comes from everywhere, doesn't it: funders, institutions, colleagues, my own schooling or academic learning, all pulling you toward an early answer. I think, if I'm honest, I spent longer than I needed to apologising for what I couldn't yet articulate. As if not having the words yet was some kind of failing, rather than just an honest account of where the work actually was.

What I came to understand, and this took a while, is that the inability to describe what a piece of work is producing, especially in its early and middle stages, is often the clearest sign that something genuinely new is happening. If I could already describe it using the categories criminology had given me, it probably wasn't the work yet.

That didn't happen all at once, either. It happened in the gaps between meetings. In conversations with you [Lucía] and the team, where none of us quite knew what we were describing yet. And in sitting in a room in the prison, just listening to something take shape, with no existing framework to place it under.

I don't think this is a gap in the many 'criminologies' I have learned from. I know that plenty of people in this field and related spaces already know how to stay without knowing, and do it far better than I did at the start. What I'm describing is more personal than that. Staying without knowing takes real, active effort, more than I expected, coming from a background that treats uncertainty as a problem to be solved rather than a condition you work with.

What I can say now, having lived through it, is that not knowing wasn't a failure. It was a genuine letting go of expertise, enough that the work could actually happen.

If I take anything transferable from this into future work, it's not a method. It's a memory of what it felt like to stop performing a certainty I didn't have, and what became possible once I did.

Insight 2: *The words you share are not the understandings that your share.*

We used the same words for a long time before we discovered we meant different things by them. Participation. Voice. Methodology. Production. Justice. Impact. Words that feel like common ground can function, for longer than is comfortable to admit, as a substitute for it. We remember this as a key moment in the collaboration, and wanted to reflect on it here. So we wanted to share with one another how we understood that now.

Lucía: *The constant renegotiation of meaning is at the centre of any collaboration. The tensions between the academic experience and the artistic production can potentially create misunderstandings and complex situations that, in my experience, can only be held with compassion and transparency.*

This goes back to the translator role mentioned in the previous insight. No one person serves as the translator, translation becomes an apparatus in itself, based on three principles: asking what we do not understand (the many times we nodded politely ended up in misunderstandings…), translating it for our collaboration, and deciding how to carry it back to our institutions and worlds (academic, artistic, prison…).

A dialogue based on trust goes a long way: you can rehearse how you use terminology, and accessing academic theory allowed us to have a more nuanced understanding of our own way of doing things and take into account in which context someone is using a term.

Emma: *I arrived at this collaboration assuming I already knew how to be careful with language. What I hadn't reckoned with is that criminology doesn't speak with one voice, and the version I carry around in my own head is already an argument, not a settled vocabulary. I came from a background that measures and manages, and a critical approach that treats those same words with real suspicion, and I'd never quite noticed how much I switched between the two without saying so.*

There's something in criminology's own history with words like voice and participation that should have made me more alert to this sooner, actually. It's one of the insights I thought I was already bringing into the room. Knowing that a consultation often gets called participation. A box-ticking exercise is often referred to as 'giving voice' - even when people already have a voice. In doing so the values which underpin what we are trying to do can get lost in the process. I could see that clearly in broader institutional arrangements. But what I hadn't done was turn that insight on myself, in the room, in real time. I wasn't hollowing anything out deliberately. I was using words I trusted because they'd always done the job before, without stopping to ask whether they still were, here, with this collaboration, with these people. Carrying an insight around isn't the same as applying it to yourself.

What I'd carry into another project isn't a new insight, really. It's the same one, just pointed in a different direction by a commitment to a kind of reflexive praxis that turns that suspicion on myself, and going back to the words that feel most settled, the ones nobody's debating, again and again, especially when it feels unnecessary and asking how those words and concepts are functioning politically for people in each new space.

Insight 3: *Recognising our shared journey on different paths.*

There were moments when our disciplines pulled in different directions, and it rarely announced itself as political. It arrived instead as a difference of approach, a matter of judgement, a disagreement about method. It wasn't that we weren't being honest with each other. It was that, at the start, we simply understood the work differently. So we wanted to ask each other what was actually sitting underneath those disagreements, and what it meant to name the political question rather than let it pass as a technical one.

Lucía: *We are not claiming that presenting this work in the art gallery turns it into a collective, inquiry-led poetic invitation. Participants did not decide that the work would be shown in an art gallery, but we communicated that at the beginning of the programme and invited them into that process… The participants participated in the decisions about the projects and artworks, and the projects, even if not fully, were presented or taken back to the prison. Working within an art gallery allows for a certain type of presentation that is technically ambitious – with an exhibition team and a space designed for that – which offers one route to the poetic element of the work, not necessarily the best or only one.*

Our programme always fluctuates around a very general question: as an art gallery interested in forms of knowledge , we are always concerned about whose knowledge is represented, and how. We put that question to artists directly, from the invitation onward, and it's what shapes the conversations that follow. Continuity determines how far that question can actually go.

The longer the relationship with a prison, the more space there is to work through different ideas with participants. What makes this hard is the constant turnover of groups inside — supporting an artist who wants to build with one long-term group isn't always possible, and that shapes what gets made and who it represents. Some of the ideas that shaped a work came from a participant we never saw again. Some participants only saw the finished work after they'd already left.

I would also bring here that FACT held the budget and the KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) for the art programme, which put pressure on Emma to make sure her time was recognised by her own institution. We were also building on an existing relationship, which meant the shift to a formal Criminologist in Residence role was less about starting something new than about understanding a role neither of us had really seen before, and finding a shape for it that felt embedded rather than added on. That took the same approach we would bring to any deep engagement — time in interviews with artists, dinners, debriefs with the team.

The harder moments weren't really about language, though there were some of that too, working through enough coffees that it left the relationship more equal, not less. What stays with me are the conversations with prison staff and directors, and the work of translating between our different registers of expertise. Writing about

our duty of care was one of those moments, it forced us to be explicit about what it meant to occupy space inside the prison, and to fold in Emma's own experience and translation work. We stayed open to whatever academic output FACT needed from her, not as a concession but because it ended up serving both sides.

Emma: *What still strikes me is how the site visits, the duty of care conversations, the coffees, can sit outside how I used to understand "project management," "logistics," the practical steps to get something running smoothly. They are that. But they were also where the ethics of the project actually got worked out, not in a document but in the doing, and where I first noticed that Lucía and I were on the same journey while walking it in completely different ways.*

Take the duty of care. On paper it sounds administrative, something you write once and file. In practice, writing it meant deciding what it meant for me to occupy space inside a prison at all: whose role I was filling, what I was allowed to notice, and what wasn't mine to comment on. The form asked for procedures; answering it honestly required a position. So the document became less a technical record than a negotiation about who gets to speak, from where, and with what authority. That was the first place the difference between us became concrete. Lucía came to that negotiation from years of being in these rooms, with an ethics already formed in practice. I came from a place where we observe and then reflect and write afterwards. We were completing the same document and answering different questions.

The Criminologist in Residence model made the same thing visible from another angle. I'll be honest, there was real pressure from my own institution to point at something and say, this is what my time produced, and rightly so, institutions need to capture that. But this was a genuinely new role, and we were lucky to have the space to let it breathe first. I had to sit inside something that hadn't existed before and figure out with Lucía what it was for, rather than importing what a research partnership usually looks like and hoping it fit. What I learned there came from being present, week after week, and from the discomfort of not yet knowing what my presence was for. It took longer than expected, and it made clear that we were building the road as we walked it, from two quite different starting points.

The same shift, from procedure to relationship, ran through what you, Lucía, said about the art gallery. You were honest that participants didn't decide the work would end up there, but that this was communicated early, and that the decisions they did make, about the projects and the artworks, mattered more than where it would eventually be shown. I found that distinction clarifying. It's not that every decision needs to sit with every participant for the work to be legitimate. It's that you have to be precise about which decisions were theirs, and say so, rather than letting the language of participation quietly cover decisions that were never really shared. That precision is an ethical practice, and you learn it by being answerable to people in a room, first and foremost.

That's the thread I keep pulling on. We weren't always disagreeing when it felt like we were. More often we were arriving at the same question, duty of care, KPIs, who manages the budget, who gets continuity with a group and who doesn't, from different disciplines, different training, different instincts about what mattered first. Each time, what looked like an administrative decision turned out to be a relational one, settled less by policy than by who was there and what they were prepared to be responsible for. All of that is a method. All of that is also, unavoidably, political.

And recognising that we were on the same journey, walking different paths and learning the ethics of it on the ground, changed how I heard everything Lucía said after that.

Insight 4: *Crossing disciplinary boundaries changes you, not just your work.*

Crossing into someone else's discipline is not comfortable, and it is not meant to be. We wanted to ask each other honestly whether this project changed us, not just our practice, and what we each had to leave behind to be in this work together. It took a conversation about curation for that to become clear, and for the politics of doing this work, and sharing it, to come into view.

Lucía: *This project has changed my understanding of the practice and the work that I do. It has given me a more critical understanding of how art is part of a bigger agenda. I always thought it was healthy to have projects which happen out of the institution, and also important that the work is produced in a place that gives the best resources to the artists. This programme has taught me to balance the complexity of art leaving the arts sector and then coming back, and the politics related to each of those moments. The language, too: it provides a more rigorous, and sometimes problematic, terminology to soundboard and explain what we do, and why it is important.*

It has also been an opportunity to reflect on curation, something that is easy to lose sight of in this kind of cross-sector work. Social science research, in particular, can forget how central curation is when working with artists: it is not the arrangement of objects in a room, but the conditions we create for the relationship between artworks, artists and audiences. It is present in how we invite artists, in the briefs we build from what we learn across projects, in the different layers that make up the story. A story that, at the end of the day, is not ours.

In terms of time and pace, art gallery workers rarely have the privilege of engaging at a slower pace that allows you to read and unpack; they usually have to do that in your own time. The alignment with research here, gave us the excuse, or the opportunity, to push for more reflective time within the programme. This allowed a lot of thinking in between projects, which benefited decisions in the long term.

Emma: *This project changed me as much as it changed the methods I'll use in future, honestly. I came into it thinking an interdisciplinary exchange was something I could learn from and carry back, largely intact, into my own work. What I didn't expect was how much of myself I'd need to leave at the door of the prison, and then again at the door of the art gallery, just to actually be useful in either space.*

Working alongside Lucía meant sitting inside decisions that weren't mine to make, and noticing how much I was translating, between what I believed criminology expected of me and what the room actually needed. That work changed how I listen, properly changed it.

I say this quietly, without any claim to originality. Other people who've worked this way far longer than I have still find themselves translating, and translating well

remains crucial. What I mean is something more specific than that. It's the moment when two disciplines use the same language, evidence, voice, participation, and still produce knowledge that looks and feels completely different to the people receiving it. Because what counts as sensible is itself situated, and political, not shared just because the words are. Engaging with Rancière on the distribution of the sensible actually helped me hold onto that idea. Some of what this work produced was never going to survive that kind of translation, and I've come to think that isn't a failure. Some things stay where they were learned, with the people who learned them, and sometimes that's enough.

What I'd carry forward isn't a bigger toolkit. Not everything from this work can be taken away and used elsewhere, and I've come to think that's allowed. What travels with me is quieter than that. The questions I'll ask next time that I wouldn't have thought to ask before. The things I'll notice because I've been changed by people who weren't trying to teach me anything. And the things I'll never do again. There are also things I know I'll carry into other work, and I hold those carefully, because they came from specific people, in a specific place.

Insight 5. *Art leads, without a research question shaping it from the start.*

That the work was able to lead, without a research question shaping it from the outset, was not a matter of individual generosity or good practice. It was a function of how the work was funded and held. The gallery's funding structures, and the project's place within FACT's wider programme, made room for the work to develop on its own terms. A project held primarily as social science research would have found that space much harder to sustain. Research funding, even when generous, almost always carries a question waiting somewhere: an outcome the funder will eventually want named. That pressure shapes the work long before anyone consciously lets it.

McNeill and Urie (2020) describe something similar in the development of *Distant Voices*, where collaboration came long before collaborative research. When that work became a formally funded research project, new accountabilities and structures of governance brought with them questions of power that its earlier, more relational phases had not had to answer. Like them, we have come to think that what happens before a project is called research matters as much as what happens after.

Lucía: *This flexibility extended to the objectives of the project themselves, or more precisely, to how those objectives were reached. There was room to learn as the work progressed, to carry lessons from one project into the next, and to keep sight of the overarching aim: to explore the creation of art across sectors, opening up questions and challenging existing systems and ways of working in a more reflective way. The pressure to collaborate and to learn quickly about each other's worlds — the prison system, social science, and production — was real, but the research questions themselves were built collaboratively along the way, rather than arriving pre-formed.*

It is worth recognising, too, that there is an immense amount of pressure within arts funding, different in kind from that of the academic sector, but no less present. Equally, it is worth acknowledging the generosity of some funders in allowing the work to unfold slowly.

Emma: *I think this is worth naming plainly, or at least trying to. It is not enough to say researchers should hold back and let the work breathe. That matters, but it makes it sound as though letting go is simply a matter of will, and will alone is hard to sustain inside a structure that is quietly asking for the opposite. Researchers are still expected to publish, to produce something legible as an output, and that expectation does not disappear simply because a particular project has made room for a different kind of role. What happens, then, when the role genuinely changes — when presence and attentiveness are the contribution, rather than a paper or a framework? I want to make a case for more of that kind of role, though I am aware it is not easily done, or necessarily appealing to everyone.*

For our learning in partnership, I think this asks us to sit with whether, and how, funding structures themselves might need to change if collaborations like this are to be possible more widely. If we want art to genuinely lead, and knowledge to emerge in its own time and form, we may need to think as carefully about the funding and institutional architecture holding a project as we do about the relationships inside it. That is harder to design for than a good working relationship, and I do not think I fully appreciated it until I saw what this particular structure made possible — precisely, perhaps, because I was not the one holding the funding, or the question, at the centre of it.

Conclusion

This resource began with a question set for us by the *Imagining Possible Futures* project: *what is the relationship between coproduction, research and arts informed knowledge creation*? We have not answered that question so much as lived inside it, across a prison, an art gallery and a university, and across the many people, Dave, Sarah, Melanie, the Learning team, Charlotte, Jess, Joan, whose work made the collaboration possible long before either of us thought to call it research. We have drawn on *Resolution* here as a case study of how some of this work is taking shape in the present moment, and we recognise that many others are working across these same boundaries, in similar ways and in very different ones, and that this is only one account among many. What follows is not a set of conclusions in the usual sense. It is closer to what we noticed ourselves returning to, across every section of this resource, offered provisionally to others thinking about starting something similar.

Shared language: how it works.

We used the same words for a long time before we discovered we meant different things by them. That did not resolve itself. What helped, when it helped, was a standing habit, returned to throughout rather than settled once, of asking whether a shared word was still doing what we thought it was doing. We offer that here not as a technique to adopt but as something we are still learning ourselves, a discipline that has to be practised and rebuilt in every new collaboration, because words will always feel like common ground before they have actually been tested as one.

If this resource is useful to anyone else attempting this kind of work, we hope it is useful in that spirit, not as a template, but as an honest account of what it took to build shared language and shared trust here, in this particular partnership, so that others might find their own way toward it, in their own time.

Principles of working across criminology and art.

The residency was a shared space of making, not a site of instruction. Learning moved in more than one direction, and it changed each of us as well as the work.

We kept returning to the difficulty of arriving with outcomes already named, and to what it meant, each time, to let that difficulty stay unresolved for longer than felt comfortable. The inability to say what a collaboration is producing, particularly in its early stages, turned out to be something we came to trust rather than something to explain away.

There was almost always a political question sitting beneath a methodological one, whose knowledge counts, who the work is for, and we noticed how easily reporting structures could flatten that question into something more manageable, more finished sounding, than it actually was.

We also noticed how much of this collaboration depended on people rarely named as knowledge holders: gatekeepers, long-term staff, exhibition, marketing and communications, and visitor teams, learning teams, whose trust, continuity and judgement the work relied on entirely, often without much visible credit.

And sharing, we came to think, is not really a separate stage that happens once the real work is finished. It asks the same care, the same attentiveness, as everything that came before it.

Crossing into another discipline changed each of us, not only our practice, and we came to understand that differently over time, less as a loss of rigour and more as a different, sometimes more honest, way of working.

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Resources

To support this way of working, we are sharing a set of resources: our duty of care, how to work through a community agreement and a tool to check on each other during a project. These tools are designed for our projects, but can be adapted to your own context.
If you want to share how you have used them, please contact: **learning@fact.co.uk.**

Duty of Care

This is how we understand our ethical responsibilities towards the participants and the team working in a project (artists, arts producers and facilitators, and collaborators), and the artwork:

1. Inform and explain to the participants what they are doing, why and how, giving them the opportunity to option out, and understanding their participation as an ongoing consent.

2. Inform and consult with the participants about how the artwork is going to be presented to FACT visitors and presented as part of FACT's programme.

3. Work with the artist and support them to design experiences for the group. We are very keen for the participants to learn about artistic ways of thinking, questioning the world, how art is produced and presented to audiences, and the creative and critical use of technology.

4. Support the artist to develop their vision, and create an artwork that represents their ideas and the participants, with the audience in mind. Making sure the language we use represents the participants' lived experience.

5. Creating a space where every collaborator feels respected as an expert on their field and as a person, and be transparent about the institution's intention.

We have learned to be clear about the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved. For example, the artists lead on the creative vision and make the final artwork, while the participants bring their own experience and content of the artwork. The Learning team supports the dialogue between the artist and participants. The prison lead is not only the main communication channel, also fundamental in the recruitment and check ins with the participants.

Community Agreement

This is an agreement tool to use with collaborators and participants to gain a shared understanding of a project. It is not a step by step facilitation tool, instead, it helps you to think through questions.

In our experience, participants in a prison rarely stay the same throughout a long-term project, and the people who stay can change, too. Take this into account when deciding what the project will look like, and manage expectations accordingly. Some of these questions need to be asked more than once.

What are we doing together?

In partnerships, the project might have been agreed as part of a contract or funding proposal, and the artists have their own brief based on that. It is important to share a summary of the project or artistic proposal with the participants.

Questions

- What do we think about this?
- Is there anything that does not work at the time of beginning the project?
- Who is responsible for what?

Best hopes, what are we aiming to achieve and how?

In this section, we go back to the project objectives. It is important to keep these best hopes safe, as we will go back to them when we are checking on each other throughout the project.

Questions

- What are your best hopes based on the different objectives?
- Is there anything that comes to your mind as you are thinking about the project?

Communication

How we communicate with each other.

Questions

- What is your preferred way to share information?
- Where and how can we store documentation, footage and content?
- Who should access this information and how?

How we communicate the project.

Questions

- Who needs to sign off public texts and what does that process look like?
- How and when do we involve participants?

Ways of Working

It is important to remember that there are not replicable models, it depends on the type of artwork.

Time with the participants:

- What does the work with participants look like?
- How many sessions? What type of activities are we doing?
- What do the participants expect or what are they expected to do?

Making the artwork:

- What is each collaborator, partner and participant's role in this part of the project?
- When would we share progress and final outputs?
- What would decision making look like?
- Do the participants participate in the making? If so, what would that look like?

Consent and Crediting

In our experience, this needs to be agreed case by case, and depending on the partnership, might need to follow mandatory regulations. It is important to discuss what each partner needs and how they understand this process.

With the participants:

- What does consent look like?
- How does a participant withdraw?
- Is there a way to hand over work or ideas to others?
- What are the different moments of the project in which consent is needed and for what?
- Who is credited and how? Artworks are shown in an art gallery, sometimes online, there will be general audience and documentation, what are the participants saying yes and no to?

Safeguarding

It is key to understand the different partners' safeguarding policies and procedures.

Questions

- Who is responsible for safeguarding in different moments of the project?
- Who needs to be informed if a safeguarding incident has happened?
- How will we share risk assessments?

What are we making together?

If we have created an artwork for a public audience:

- How is it going to be presented?
- Who is involved in that process?
- What parts of this process are shared with participants?
- How is it brought back to those who cannot visit the gallery?

Any public artwork includes a communication campaign, it is key to involve the participants in that process:

- What words would you use to describe your experience or your community?
- What are the key messages of the exhibition?

Roles during facilitation

We talked about the importance of roles in the Duty of Care, we suggest the following conversations.

As a partnership or group of collaborators:

Participants often get used to seeing many people during sessions and activities, while only a few are actually facilitating. It is important to explain what each person does and when participants will see them:

- Who is responsible for what?
- Who is the person who knows the project and the collaboration, and can check in on participants between sessions?

Ideally, the artist will spend time with the participants and collaborators before committing to the project, and explore what works best:

- How does the artist prefer to share their practice and work?
- What role does the artist envision the participants having?
- How would we like to discuss and agree this with them?

Once the participants are confirmed:

- What would they like to know about the artist and the team?
- What are they interested in?
- What helps them feel comfortable?

Check-in

This is a tool to discuss, reflect and manage expectations through the duration of a project, and can be adapted for participants, collaborators and artists.

Circling back to Best Hopes

Ideally, we would have the best hopes (from the community agreement) in front of us.

Why did you accept this invitation?

Why have you continued to show up?

What have you noticed about the project lately that you are pleased with?

Is what we're doing different from what you agreed to?
How is it different from the intentions and hopes at the top?
If needed, how do we need to adjust?
Who do we need to inform?

It is important to check with the artist regularly about how the work with the participants might influence the final artwork, and what needs to be in place to support this.

Credits

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Melanie Crean, *A Machine to Unmake You* (M2UY) (2019-2024)
Created in collaboration with incarcerated veterans and staff at HMP Altcourse. This project is produced by FACT Liverpool in collaboration with Liverpool John Moores University and funded by Paul Hamlyn Foundation, with additional support from the US Embassy. Courtesy of the artist.

Katrina Palmer, *Sentences* (2023)
A project by Katrina Palmer, in collaboration with HMP Altcourse, HMP Askham Grange, Novus Prison Education at HMP Buckley Hall and Liverpool John Moores University. This project is produced by FACT Liverpool in collaboration with Liverpool John Moores University and funded by Paul Hamlyn Foundation. Courtesy of the artist.

Ain Bailey, *FOUR* (2024)
A project by Ain Bailey, in collaboration with imprisoned men at HMP Buckley Hall and their families. This project is a collaboration with NOVUS and produced by FACT Liverpool in collaboration with Liverpool John Moores University and funded by Paul Hamlyn Foundation. Courtesy of the artist.

Amartey Golding, *Chainmail 4: Silent Knight* (2025)
A project by Amartey Golding, in collaboration with HMP Altcourse. This project is produced by FACT Liverpool in collaboration with Liverpool John Moores University, Anglia Ruskin University and funded by Paul Hamlyn Foundation. Courtesy of the artist.


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