

Chris Sharratt: What did In Kind achieve or find out?

Ailie Rutherford and Janie Nicoll: *In Kind* project gives insight into the level of unpaid labour and exploitation of artists that arts festivals generally rely on; a perspective on the real cost to artists and the lack of proper diversity in terms of whose voices are platformed by festivals like GI.

Chris Sharratt: What should happen next?

Ailie Rutherford and Janie Nicoll: As part of *In Kind* project we have devised a list of demands (available on our website) these are being continually developed and were revised through the *In Focus* event with Create London at Barbican, London and *A Blancing Act* with Axisweb at Kinning Park Complex in Glasgow.

We need to see a radical overhaul of the current funding system which is exclusive, elitist and relies heavily on the exploitation and unpaid labour of artists across the sector. We agree with the Movement for Cultural Democracy who want to see funding made available not just to a privileged few, but fairly and equitably distributed to people and communities most in need.

This year has seen a revised version of GI for 2020 which now looks like a more streamlined version of the festival and will likely have fewer participating artists, giving grants to those whose projects demonstrate “ambition and critical quality”.

We would like to see greater transparency on who is defining quality. While it was always the intention of *In Kind* project to show that the total funds available to artists exhibiting in the festival was insufficient to support the number of artists participating and exhibiting, it was never our intention that a similar sized pot of funds should instead be used to support a smaller number of artists, making the festival more exclusive.

One of the points made at our discussion event “Who Can Afford to Be An Artist” held at Platform Eatserhouse during GI2018 was that huge areas of Glasgow do not even appear on the GI map, in a festival that includes an “Across the city” strand.

Now that “Across the city” has become a major section of the festival we would hope that it will include greater representation of work from areas of the city not previously on the map and doesn’t just pay lip service to diversity.

The GI application process now states that it “welcomes proposals which represent the diversity of the city and the people who live here... and where particular thought has been given to accessibility and engaging new audiences” What we hope GI will be doing is giving preference to project proposals which represent the diversity of the city and the people who live here. As this type of work usually costs more, will those proposals receive a proportionately larger sum of money? The idea of engaging new audiences is problematic if funding remains with artists from a similar demographic. We hope that this new version of the festival means GI intend to grant funds to artists who truly represent the diversity of the city and the people who live here. Ensuring that the festival platforms the voices of artists from across the city would do more to engage new audiences and broaden the GI map.

It is really important that artists become more aware of the impact of self-exploitation. We would we like to see organisations like GI take a lead in encouraging artists to realistically cost their proposed projects, looking closely at the budget breakdown when selecting work, making it clear from the outset that they will only fund projects with a realistic budget that do not exploit themselves or other artists by expecting free labour.

Artists need to recognise self-exploitation and think carefully before proposing projects that are unrealistically ambitious and that would cost way more than the available budget. It would help to level the playing field if artists were all to submit proposals that are to scale with the available grants. When it’s highly competitive to get the funding or even to be included in these festivals it’s tempting for artists to propose works that are extremely ambitious in order to be included but the knock on effect is that only some artists can afford to operate in this way, making it impossible for less privileged artists to be included in the programme.

The above interview was conducted with Chris Sharratt as research for the Frieze article <https://frieze.com/article/why-artists-are-struggling-make-living-their-art-and-activists-fighting-back>