



**COLLABORATIVE  
STRATEGY**

# OUR MISSION &

COLLABORATIVE



STRATEGY

## WHO IS GRAND UNION?

Grand Union is a gallery and artist studios located in Birmingham's cultural quarter. Established in 2010, today we currently occupy three units in an industrial building, previously a metalworking factory, on Fazeley Street in Digbeth, Birmingham.

We house workspace for 22 artists and present a lively programme of contemporary exhibitions and events.

Grand Union supports and presents innovative artistic and curatorial practice. We believe that a strong artistic community is an essential part of an integrated city.

## OUR MISSION

Working with artists, curators and writers, we place an emphasis on commissioning new art, supporting artistic and curatorial career development and encouraging critical experimentation. Our gallery based public programme of exhibitions and events comprises artists at a crucial point in their career and offer space and support to develop new work.

We are active in working collaboratively with a range of public and private sector organisations. Our collaborative public programme incorporates both gallery based art exhibitions and projects located in the public realm. We have developed extensive experience of working collaboratively in partnerships across private, public and charity sectors to develop and support artist commissions and meaningful participatory engagement

projects, from conception through production to public presentation.

Working with and for our communities, we are committed to developing and supporting quality artistic activity beyond the gallery space. We explore new sites and contexts for the public to engage with art. We connect people and practices – artists, curators and audiences – to exchange and engage with each other. A multiplicity of voices contribute to, and participate in, our programmes and organisation.

## THE COLLABORATIVE STRATEGY

Grand Union is committed to expanding the way that it programmes and actively builds new audiences for art. Through our Collaborative Programme, Grand Union has been using its cultural capital to support and create visible platforms for critically thinking and engaging across sectors and disciplines: proactively responding to urgent issues surrounding social and ecological justice.

Birmingham, like so many city centres in an era of post-industrialisation, has become increasingly polarised, separated by those who 'have' and those who 'do not', some profit from privilege and wealth, whilst there are those that are really struggling to survive. We believe that art can be a tool for social change, but only when embedded within communities, with and for them. We work with other arts organisations, but more importantly across many other communities and organisations to connect cultural and community work.



# THE GROWING PROJECT



## SPRING HOUSING GROWING SITES

Through our community-led growing scheme The Growing Project, we collaborate with several local Birmingham and Digbeth based organisations who support the vulnerably-housed and people in crisis. The Growing Project aims to 'Green-Sense' the city, improve sites across Birmingham by growing food and creating green spaces, places that are developed, tended and nurtured by homeless people.

The successful pilot at St.Anne's Hostel resulted in a harvest dinner for 60 people, including Andy Street WMCA Mayor and local landowners, seated alongside residents of St.Anne's and members of Crisis and SIFA Fireside. Participants of the project have gained valuable skills and have gone onto enrol on horticultural courses at Birmingham Botanical Gardens and Cofton Nursery.

Spring Housing Association have commissioned Grand Union to create three more gardens in their properties across the city in 2020 (Bearwood, Great Barr and Handsworth) having seen the impacts the initial project had upon the supported housing context.

### THE GROWING PROJECT COLLABORATORS (SUPPORTED HOUSING SECTOR)

#### CRISIS

Crisis supports people out of homelessness. They do this through education, training and support

with housing, employment and health, offering one to one help, advice and courses for homeless people in 12 areas across England, Scotland and Wales.

#### SIFA FIRESIDE

SIFA provides inclusion, engagement and equal access to services to individuals who are disadvantaged or experiencing homelessness. SIFA works to influence the strategic development of the homelessness agenda in local and national arenas.

#### ST ANNES

St Annes is a Digbeth based hostel that offers quality accommodation for homeless men over 25 years of age - offering a safe and secure environment where residents can access services which meet immediate welfare needs. St Anne's signpost appropriate services to each resident's individual needs to encourage the obtaining and retaining move-on accommodation.

#### SPRING HOUSING

Spring Housing aims to create long term prosperity by investing to prevent homelessness, poverty and social isolation and to inspire and unlock people's potential. They provide high-quality accommodation for people in housing need to prevent and reduce homelessness. They assist people on a journey away from housing need towards a future of stability, happiness and independence.

#### HAGLEY LODGE - BEARWOOD

Working with the residents, we are looking to transform this space into a welcoming place to sit, rest and socialise with other residents. We are looking to incorporate planting of edible trees, wildflowers and water to encourage as many birds, bees and butterflies to breathe life into this space. Working with Environmentalist and Gardener Matthew Cox, we are creating a garden that brings wildness into the urban landscape.

#### HESTIA HOUSE - GREAT BARR

Working in partnership with Avalon Landscapes, we are looking to create a garden space on the site of a car park. Spring is innovative in how they are seeking housing solutions for the people they look after. This site will see a repurposed office block car park transformed into a community garden space offering much-needed space for residents and Hub users to socialise together.

#### RICHMOND HOUSE - HANDSWORTH

Working with the residents, we are gently persuading this garden back into a restful space with herbal, medicinal and wild plants. Keen to grow some edibles which the residents will incorporate into community outdoor cooking events. Working with Artist Gardener Carolyn Morton, together we are creating a garden that interweaves growing, cooking and healing.

# BIRMINGHAM FOOD NETWORKS



Grand Union has been working to develop conversations and connections around food production and distribution both locally in the city centre and through wider global issues. During the pandemic we have strengthened these connections, working with other organisations and contributing to a local Food Justice Network Discussion. Working together, this network of community groups, organisations and agencies aim to tackle the unsustainable social and environmental aspects of our food system within Birmingham.

The network aims to; Bring visibility to the community food justice work underway in Birmingham. Link up organisations, agencies, groups and individuals to build a more robust support network. Generate discussion and action towards a fairer food system through

participatory action research and participatory learning.

We have working relationships with many food projects, initiatives and independent producers around Digbeth and the wider Birmingham area, these include;

[Junk Food Project](#)

[Eat Make Play](#)

[Incredible Surplus](#)

[Digbrew](#)

[Clean Kilo](#)

[Slowfood Birmingham](#)

[Kings Heath Food Assembly](#)

[Bearwood Pantry](#)

[Freedom Wines](#)

[Change Kitchen](#)

[TAWS \(The Active Wellbeing Society\)](#)



# COMMUNITY

Through our collaborations, we work with the Birmingham and Digbeth community from a range of backgrounds and ages. The Collaborative Strategy is to think with and alongside people, developing a programme that helps to consider our futures in the post industrial city. One that clearly positions and fights for social and ecological justice.

## REPAIR AND CARE

Led by Jo Capper, Grand Unions Collaborative Programme Curator, we invited key members of the local community and neighbourhood to help reimagine and shape the future of Digbeth and our organisation.

As a group, we did some initial thinking, dreaming and research with a focus on building a collective community of care. One that responded to and repairs the communal experience of being, living and working in the city. Asking how Grand Union thinks about its future and the future ecology of Digbeth's residents, small businesses, and arts organisations. The thinking of the initial phase led to the formation of The Growing Project which seeks to restore environmental and social justice.

## ED WEBB-INGALL

### FORMING A RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

Grand Union is working with filmmaker Ed Webb



Ingall to develop a new project exploring the role of video in response to the UK housing crisis. Holding a series of meetings, screenings and workshops, together, we will connect a national network of community and activist organisations with galleries and museums. We aim to co-produce a 'tool-kit' of resources to share our findings across these cultural and community partnerships.

This network is formed between social justice and grassroots activist organisations in each of the following cities: Birmingham (Grand Union), Nottingham (Nottingham Contemporary), Glasgow (LUX Scotland) and Liverpool (Rule of Three).

Birmingham, like many city centres in an era of post-industrialisation, has become increasingly polarised. Separated by those who 'have' and those who 'do not'; some people profit from privilege and wealth, whilst others struggle to survive. This project is rooted in the idea that art can be a tool for social change, but only when embedded within communities, with and for them.

## THE FEAST

Grand Union works with THE FEAST to develop a collaborative programme between artists and young people, to unite youths through the

medium of art. THE FEAST looks for different ways to engage young people of other faiths, who would never have otherwise met, to enable them to make friends, explore identity and talk about religion. Responding to themes and ideas presented through the Grand Union exhibition programme, participants work with artists such as Susie Green, Mitra Saboury, Eric Moschopedis and Mia Ruston.

## HS2 - THINKING FUTURES

Commissioned by HS2, curated and produced by Grand Union in collaboration with Sofia Niazi, and supported by The Feast; Thinking Futures was a project which invited young people to consider past, present and future connections between communities and city infrastructures. This engagement programme aimed to develop the artistic potential of GCSE Art students from Broadway Academy and Nishkam High School, through developing new ways of experiencing the historic and contemporary architecture within Digbeth. The students' work reflects upon their histories and re-imagines new post-industrial futures.

The participants have co-produce a programme of public experiences which include city walking tours, talks and a zine publication. Due to COVID-19, outcomes have been postponed.

# COMMERCIAL

It is vital that we are part of the dialogue of Digbeth's future, to support and give space to the people, charities, organisations and businesses that call it home. We have connections and partnerships with several landowners, developers and the Birmingham City Council that are currently planning and developing the future landscape of Digbeth. Through our collaborative programme, we look for opportunities to bring different groups, people and experiences together so that we can learn from each other. Last year The Growing Project successfully brought the WMCA Mayor, local landowners and developers together with residents of St. Anne's Hostel and members of Crisis and SIFA Fireside over a harvest dinner. Developers and Land Management we are developing unique partnerships to explore the relationship between commerce and culture in the city through developing new and more opportunities for artists: Artist in Residence, Commissioning artworks, Exhibitions, Workshops and exhibition events.

## BRUNTWOOD

As part of their ongoing commitment to support artists in the region, Bruntwood property developers commissioned Grand Union studio holders to produce several permanent site-specific works for their sites, such as artist Jo Masding commission for Corner Block building, Birmingham. We also have worked together to set up an artist in residence partnership with Bruntwood, offering free studio space in the city centre, for artists based in Birmingham. This

partnership has enabled artists to engage in a non-art environment exchanging new ideas and knowledge across sectors, creating innovative and experimental approaches to studio practice.

## CANALS AND RIVERS TRUST

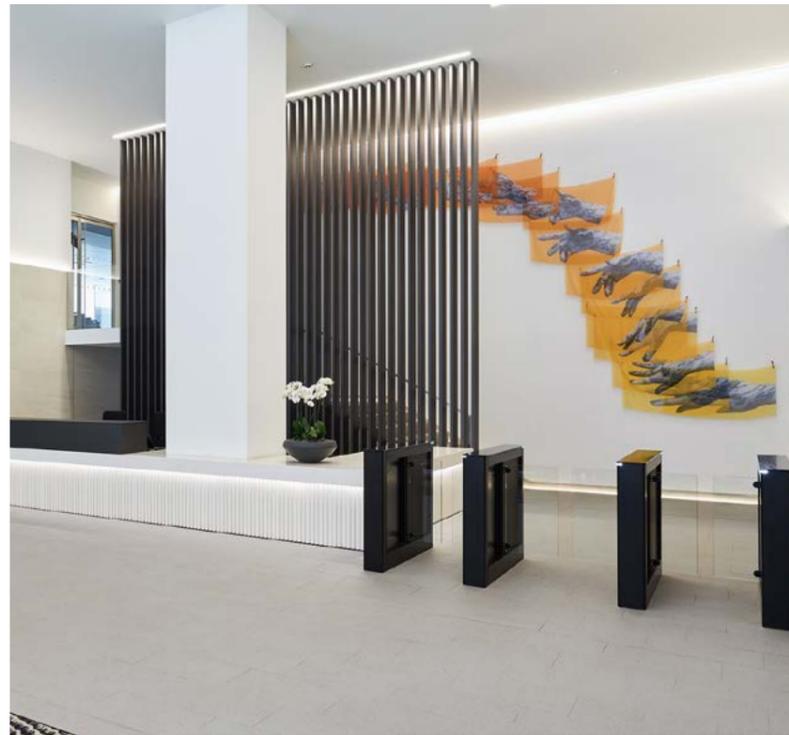
We have a long-standing partnership with Canal & River Trust on temporary artistic commissions and events in Digbeth waterways, working with artists to unlock key histories and knowledges of the West Midlands waterways.

## DIGBETH ACCESS GROUP- STRATEGIC COMMUNITY AND BUSINESS GROUP

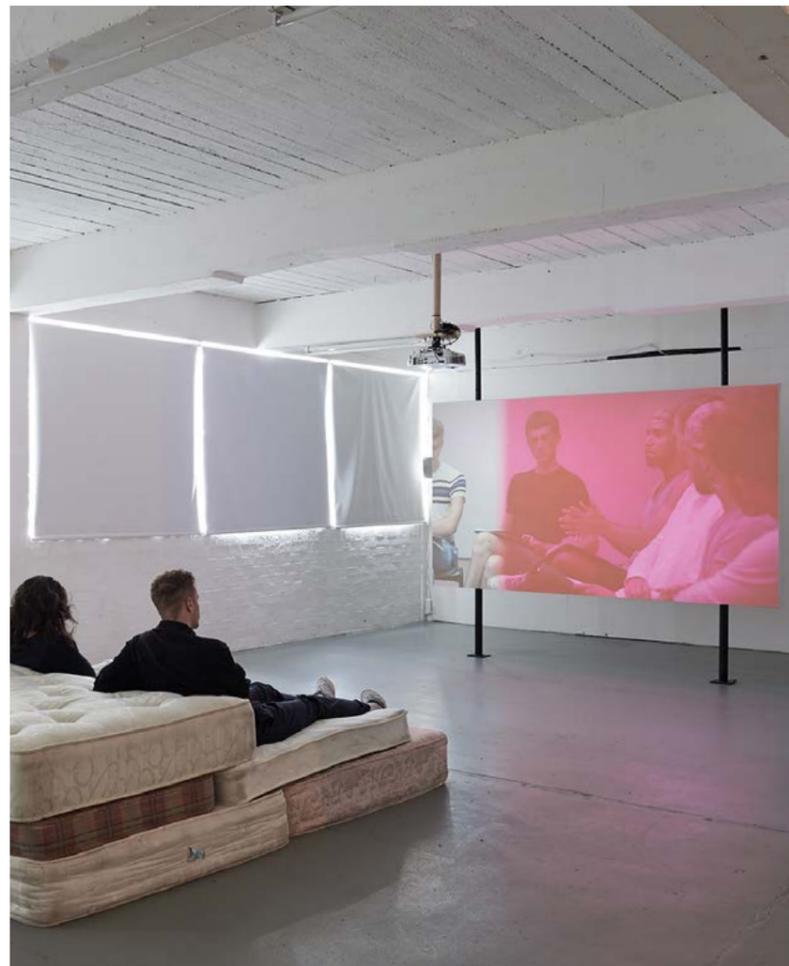
Grand Union have been meeting with Birmingham City Council and neighbouring organisations and businesses such as Friends of the Earth, Oval estates and The Polish Centre, to address the concerns of the current issues HS2 construction is presenting, e.g. blocking of major pedestrian routes into Digbeth from the city centre, and considering methods for improving access to Digbeth. With Intervention Architecture we have developed a new lighting and wayfinding proposal for the group and are currently applying for a project grant from Groundworks.

## HOMES ENGLAND - JUNCTION WORKS

Grand Union is leading a £3.25m project to bring a Grade II listed building on Fazeley Street, Digbeth, Birmingham, back into use. Working with Homes England, we will transform the derelict Junction Works building into a new contemporary art gallery and artist studios.



*Flimsy Signals*, 2018. Jo Masding.



*Three Models for Change*, 2018. UoB Exhibition.

# UNIVERSITIES

Grand Union both teaches and works in partnership with local universities to support students and recent graduates in the early stages of their artistic careers. Offering space for young artists and curators to connect and participate in Birmingham's vibrant arts ecology.

## BIRMINGHAM CITY UNIVERSITY

Grand Union is working in partnership with Birmingham City University to offer four graduates free co-working space for 12 months. The co-working studio compliments Grand Union's existing provision of 12 artists' studios and Modern Clay, a ceramics facility offering open access to artist and community groups in the region. Studio holders benefit from 24-hour access to a free, shared workspace (34 m<sup>2</sup>) for 11 months and mentoring from Grand Union's Curatorial team.

## UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Since 2016 Grand Union has collaborated with the Department of History, Curating and Visual Studies at the University of Birmingham to create opportunities for early-career curators to co-curate their first public exhibition and programme of events. Grand Union's Programme Director, Kim McAleese and Associate Curator, Alice O'Rourke lead taught sessions on contemporary curating providing regular mentorship and support for students to realise exhibitions of an experimental and ambitious scale.



## — ARTS

We work with an impressive network of partner organisations in the city who form part of Arts Council England's National Portfolio – [BE Festival](#), [BOM](#), [Capsule](#), [Centrala](#), [Craftspace](#), [Eastside Projects](#), [Fierce](#), [Flatpack Festival](#), [Free Radical](#), [Friction Arts](#), [Shout Festival](#), [Stan's Cafe](#) and [Vivid Projects](#) – to position Birmingham as 'The Artist Friendly City'. We do this by sharing programmes and learning and working as a network to support talent and develop artists, producers and organisers. This group also works with Culture Central to emphasise this and articulate the city as the place for artistic development across disciplines (visual art, theatre, music, art and technology).

As well as the gallery space, we house several artist studios and a co-operative ceramic studio with whom we work closely.

### OUR STUDIOS

We house purpose-built studios providing creative, professional and secure working space for visual artists in the city. We hold regular open studio events, giving visitors the opportunity to meet our artists and see their current works in progress. Find out more about our studio community and the huge range of artistic practices here.

### MODERN CLAY

Modern Clay is a co-operative studio facility housed at Grand Union, for the production of ceramics. It is accessible for artists and encouraged that the studio is available to be used by local community groups, artist educational projects and charitable groups. The studio is a resource for artists to produce their own work while developing a new programme of artistic opportunities for West Midlands artists. It offers support for community groups and is part of developing a new programme of artistic opportunities for West Midlands artists. We are currently working with Modern Clay over the next 3 years to collaborate on ceramic pots and tableware connected to the Growing Project.

