

# Grand Union

## ARTISTIC POLICY

### Introduction

Grand Union is a welcoming organisation, bringing people closer to art and artists.

Artistic research and collaboration are at the core of our work. Working with and for our communities, we are committed to developing and supporting artistic activity beyond the gallery space. We support learning and create numerous contexts for art and life to intersect, exploring new sites and contexts for the public to engage with art.

A multiplicity of voices contribute to, and participate in, our programmes and organisation. We believe that art can be a tool for social change, but only when embedded within communities, with and for them.

Grand Union houses a gallery and artists' studios complex in Digbeth, Birmingham. Here we:

- host a free programme of public exhibitions and events, with many opportunities for discussion and the sharing of ideas.
- provide high quality, affordable studios for visual artists in the heart of a supportive creative community, with frequent opportunities for members of the public to visit behind the scenes.

Grand Union's Charitable Objects are:

The promotion of the contemporary visual arts and the understanding and appreciation of the arts in general for the public benefit, by providing:

- (A) an arts centre and an exhibitions and arts events programme to enable the public to access, explore and enjoy high-quality artistic experiences;
- (B) arts education programmes and activities for the wider public and to build capacity in the arts sector.

### Collaborative Strategy

We work with people in many different ways: through commissioning artists, curators and writers for exhibitions; through long-term research with community partners and activist groups; with vulnerably-housed people on our community gardens and growing spaces; through our higher-education relationships with universities; with property developers on how to build better future cities; through national relationships with other cultural partners. We are also working on an ambitious capital project, to reinvigorate a disused grade II listed building to be our future home and an accessible art centre for the city.

Grand Union is built through honest, strong, reciprocal human relationships, which informs other aspects of our organisational values and aims. Grand Union cares about people, about futures, about histories, about art and about the environment. We work with integrity, compassion, and generosity.

Through our community-led growing scheme The Growing Project, we collaborate with several local Birmingham and Digbeth-based organisations who support people in crisis and vulnerable situations. 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 to, and nurtured by homeless people.

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 between 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.

### **Strategic Aims**

We have set out five overarching goals and strategies that will provide a framework for our work during the next five years:

1. Support artmaking, keeping art and artists at the core of our activity and facilitating community-led programming.
2. Create welcoming artistic spaces, working to improve the accessibility of all the spaces we present and make art in.
3. Be a good - considerate/welcoming/helpful - neighbour, working with our local communities and landowners to improve the area socially and environmentally.
4. Create the best working culture, ensuring it is supportive and nourishing for all who work with our organisation. This includes taking proactive steps to ensure the whole organisation, including
5. board members, staff, freelancers, studio artists and collaborators, reflects the population of Birmingham.
6. Set firm our foundations, creating a venue that is accessible, welcoming, income generating and gives the organisation a long-term base.

### **Equity and Inclusion**

In recognition of direct and indirect discrimination on the basis of the following protected characteristics: race, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, gender reassignment, religion or belief, disability, age, class, and also national or ethnic origin; Grand Union is committed to working towards providing equality of opportunity in its employment practices, board composition, marketing, artistic policies, programming and services offered to clients, participants and members of the public.

The Board of Trustees of Grand Union recognises its responsibilities in developing, implementing, and monitoring the Equity and Inclusion Policy for the organisation. This is published on our website, with tangible targets in order that we are publicly accountable. Please see our Equity and Inclusion policy [here](#).

Grand Union is committed to:

- Creating a programme that includes a range of artists, interests, cultures and creative practice from the local community and the wider world it inhabits.
- Representing and platforming under-represented voices.
- Creating a programme that can be accessed by a diverse audience.
- Ensuring the whole organisation meaningfully engages with equity and inclusion practice.
- Exceeding the legal obligations for Equality and Diversity and to fully complying with UK and European law.
- Reflecting the diversity of our region in our workforce and Board and creating a safe and welcoming organisation.
- Learning more about the deeply embedded structural reforms that are needed to make an equal society.
- Working in collaboration to learn from others and make effective use of limited resources.
- Using Grand Union's agency to contribute to societal change.

Grand Union will implement actions to:

- Ensure that no member of staff, board, volunteer, visitor, audience member or client is subject to unfair or unlawful discrimination.
- Ensure that staff and trustees understand the forms and effects of discrimination.
- Ensure the composition of the staff and Board better reflects the demographics of Birmingham.
- Promote our work digitally and where practically possible give alternative methods for audiences to engage in what we do if they cannot access them physically.
- Strengthen links with groups experiencing discrimination, and centre/platform them in our programmes.
- Increase awareness within the organisation of the needs of groups which experience discrimination in order to provide relevant services.
- Ensure that issues of equity and inclusion are central to the organisation's policies, including artistic, safeguarding, and environmental policies.

Anyone we work with is supplied with our code of conduct and invited to send any access requirements for the work. The template we use has been drawn up by Leah Clements, Alice Hattrick and Lizzy Rose on their website <https://www.accessdocsforartists.com/>.

## Programming

Grand Union will engage people with this work through an ambitious programme of projects (including exhibitions, public and socially-engaged artworks, talks, workshops, toolkits and events) that happen in the gallery space and across the city.

Grand Union's Programming Team initiates the majority of projects in line with the organisation's artistic and strategic aims. Our programming involves giving space to practitioners for long-term enquiry and research, with conversation and thinking happening over a number of years.

We do not accept unsolicited proposals, but rather develop relationships with those who want to work alongside us. If you would like to invite one of our programming team for a studio visit or chat about your work, please email [info@grand-union.org.uk](mailto:info@grand-union.org.uk).

We have at least one open call per year where people can send their portfolios and proposals for work to be shown in our programme. This often takes the form of a curated exhibition with MA Art History and Curating students from the University of Birmingham. You can [join our mailing list](#) to be kept informed, by email, about our opportunities, or follow our social media platforms - see the bottom of the homepage of our [website](#) to access these.

In 2018, Grand Union created a new position, Collaborative Programme Curator. This member of the programming team has developed a programme of collaborative artistic projects that take place beyond our gallery, whilst continuing existing partnerships. The Collaborative Programme Curator will engage directly with artists, curators, partners, and audiences to build Grand Union's community and network across the city.

## Recurring Opportunities

### Higher Education

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 and offers space for young artists and curators to connect and participate in Birmingham's vibrant arts ecology.

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 Programming team lead taught sessions on

contemporary curating providing regular mentorship and support for students to realise exhibitions and projects of an experimental and ambitious scale.

#### Curatorial Fellow

Every two years, Grand Union employs a Curatorial Fellow (on a fixed term contract) to join the Programming Team with whom they will work closely to develop and deliver our artistic programme. This is a professional development position, designed to provide curatorial and programming experience to emerging practitioners. The Curatorial Fellow will have the opportunity to lead on the development and delivery of at least one project during their employment and will work across the gallery and collaborative programme.

#### Curatorial Curriculum

This is an alternative learning programme for emerging curators, consisting of intensive workshops led by internationally renowned practitioners. The toolkits explore different forms of curatorial practice and is aimed at curators at the beginning of their careers, to offer an alternative programme to costly postgraduate study in a slightly less formal environment. Applications are sought at the beginning of each year. This is a paid course, with four bursary places available for those based in the West Midlands.

Grand Union will advertise these and any other opportunities that arise as widely as possible to gain applications from as broad an applicant base as possible.

To keep up to date with our opportunities, [subscribe to our email newsletter](#).

#### Procedures and Fees

All artists that Grand Union works with are offered a legally binding contract drafted and agreed in advance of the project. This contract includes information about our organisation and working practices.

Fees are discussed in advance of the contract, and a schedule for payment is agreed and drawn up. Grand Union is in the process of becoming a Real Living Wage employer, and we do not expect anyone that we work with to do so without payment.

The fee, production costs and expenses covered will vary depending on the nature of the commission and be in-line with available budgets.

Our payment structure is in progress at the moment, and we aim to publish this by the summer of 2022.

We are in the process of signing up to the National Real Living Wage accredited employer scheme.

Sales of artworks will be negotiated with artists for each project and outlined in the contract. Grand Union seeks to recoup production costs of artworks where they are sold, and the artist will take the remainder of the sales for that work.

If a work is re-shown or acquired into a collection, Grand Union will have proper credit lines in the cataloguing of the work.

As a charity, any income raised through sales goes directly back into supporting the organisation and our public programmes.

Any conflict of interests (outside of professional working relationships) a member of the Staff or Board Team has with the artists must be declared at board level and a case made for their inclusion. No members of the board or paid staff may show at the gallery, with the exception of those who participate as part of off-site projects or international projects where their inclusion can be demonstrated to be valid and appropriate.

Grand Union's Board of Trustees review all organisational working practices annually against the organisation's strategic aims. All policies are reviewed at least bi-annually.

### **Studio Policy**

Grand Union advertises studio spaces when they become available. There is no set time limit on studio contracts. If you would like to stay informed of studio availability please join our [mailing list](#) or check our social media platforms.

### **Value Commitments and Approach to Working**

We have been working internally throughout 2019-2020, and have drawn up a set of commitments that ties together who we are and how we work:

- Grand Union fosters artmaking and supports the growth of new cultures. We weave through the personal, political, and intellectual. We love to share the work of artists and artmaking. We care and centre people, enabling new dreams, imaginations, and possibilities. We believe that art has the power to connect and transform.
- Grand Union values physical space to enable people to come together to make and to experience art. We are working to develop multiple, welcoming, artistic spaces that can function in response to the needs of different publics in our city and beyond.
- Grand Union is human and vulnerable. We work between people and land. We listen with all of our senses, and we are attentive to different points of view, identities, and experiences.
- Grand Union cares: about people, about the environment, about futures, about histories, about art. We work from a place of integrity, compassion, generosity, and love.
- We celebrate the people who have come before us, so often unrecognised for their work: women, people from LGBTQI+, Black and disabled communities, and all those who are marginalised and discriminated against. We support and collaborate with those who come after.
- We are always learning. We take direct action. We are open to criticism. We are accountable to the communities and networks we work with. We are not neutral. We strive to challenge systems of injustice and oppression. We do not tolerate sexism, homophobia, transphobia, racism, ableism, classism.
- We wish to build lasting and reciprocal relationships beyond the organisation. We acknowledge that we are not independent, but interdependent and can only grow with mutual support.

In order to ensure these values and commitments really permeate our work, we have developed a series of policies and plans to set ourselves clear and practical targets, to measure our progress and identify positive and negative impacts. These are reviewed by both staff and trustees on a regular basis, many of which can be accessed on our website.

### **Our Working Culture**

- Everyone that comes into the space is welcomed by a member of staff, offered a drink and a seat to rest.
- Our bathroom is gender neutral. We have sanitary products and safe sex items from the LGBT Centre that are supplied to us bi-monthly and are free to take away. This is a practice that was initiated by artist Mathew Parkin in 2016.
- We prioritise sociality and informality, checking in with one another and making sure that there is always a time and a space for you to process the context and circumstances.
- We respect people's need for rest, and flexible space in the working day if it is needed. Take a walk, clear your head, get some air.

- Hosting and caring for people is an important part of who we are and what we do. We cook and eat together. So much of our thinking is done around a dinner table. When you work with us on the project, we aim to prepare and eat food with one another, in lieu of us eating in restaurants.
- We aim to be as transparent and open as possible and to make space for everyone to raise any concerns, issues, or potential misunderstandings. We provide written agreements aiming to ensure each person's expectations are aligned.
- All staff are responsible for the domestic tasks in the gallery: we all clean, cook collaboratively and the work is shared. When you work with us, you will be included in this.

We have been inspired by a number of people and organisations whom we would like to cite and thank here:

- Lucy Lopez, independent curator, and writer, who facilitated sessions with us to help us step out of our everyday work and routine and make time to write down our thoughts and beliefs in different ways.
- Tereza Stejskalova of Feminist (Art) Institution.
- The Feminist Center for Creative Work, formerly The Women's Center for Creative Work: WCCW.
- Access Docs for Artists by Leah Clements, Alice Hattrick and Lizzy Rose.
- Máiréad Enright, Reader in Feminist Legal Studies at University of Birmingham.
- Sara Ahmed, in particular her work on The Politics of Citation.