

CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART AND THE NATURAL WORLD

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CCANW and The University of Exeter: a convergence of interests

Discussion paper: Clive Adams, Centre Director, CCANW
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Introduction

This paper explores the opportunities for building a mutually advantageous, strategic partnership between CCANW and the University of Exeter (UoE). The paper has been prepared in advance of a meeting at Arts Council England on 16 November 2012 between Dom Jinks (University of Exeter), Pippa Warin and Ceri Johnson (ACE), Tristram Besterman and Clive Adams (CCANW).

The ideas that follow are, in part, a response to UoE's paper *A Gallery Space for the University of Exeter – a rationale* by Jessica Gardner and Dom Jinks submitted to UoE's senior management in September 2012. Additionally relevant are CCANW's paper (October 2012) on the proposed *Nature, Arts and the Arab World* festival; and also in October, Clive Adams attended his first meeting of the UoE 'Artists Panel' which discussed the need for a Gallery.

Background

CCANW has delivered a highly acclaimed programme of innovative arts and education from its purpose-built project space ever since it opened in Haldon Forest Park in 2006. Its mission is to enable people of all ages and backgrounds to explore the social, environmental and scientific issues involved in society's changing relationship with nature. CCANW is unique in fulfilling its mission through the mediation of contemporary art practitioners. In its six years of operation, CCANW has won widespread recognition as a leader in its field.

From its inception, CCANW has built strong organisational partnership into its strategic thinking. Its primary strategic partner continues to be the Forestry Commission (FC). As in all successful partnerships, symbiosis has been its foundation: both CCANW and the FC understand that the relationship assists each to achieve its corporate goals.

Over the past six years we have had the continuous support of Arts Council England (ACE) through *Grants for the Arts*, achieved match funding from a variety of sources, and retained experienced Trustees and staff who now deliver a programme to around 40,000 participants a year.

The Trustees of CCANW are currently reviewing the benefits and sustainability of its operation in Haldon Forest both in terms of past performance and future opportunities. The relationship with the FC has delivered many advantages but the Trustees are mindful of the challenges of operating the centre at a location that is remote from a centre of population and one, moreover, which is not served by public transport. Such constraints impose severe limitations on the impact of CCANW's programmes even for a comparatively small arts organisation that punches well above its weight.

Additional to the challenges of public access, constraints on arts funding and the uncertain future of the FC combine to convince the Trustees that CCANW should explore options for new strategic partnership with an organisation whose purpose and values are co-terminous with its own.

Response to *A Gallery Space for the University of Exeter*

CCANW welcomes the vision articulated by the paper. We see the gallery – whether on campus or in the city – as providing an opportunity to develop an unparalleled arts facility that will lend distinctiveness to the UoE. The challenge will be to ensure it is of a scale that is realistic and sustainable as well as being innovative and unique.

The vision of the UoE paper includes everything from exhibitions generated from UoE research and touring student societies, touring exhibitions from elsewhere, to exhibitions of the UoE permanent collection (including the Bill Douglas collection) and displaying other art 'treasures'. At this stage, we recognise that the net is cast wide and will gradually narrow down: if the new facility is to achieve a distinctive and coherent identity its objectives need to be tightly focused.

Coming lately onto the field of university-based gallery provision can be seen as an opportunity, for the UoE has the opportunity to do something quite different from other (competitor) universities. Its challenge is to create something quite distinctive, possibly as a bridge between the arts and sciences. Many scientific and science-based cultural organisations now commission contemporary arts practitioners to mediate public understanding of science – but there are currently no public spaces designed specifically with this purpose in mind.

Such a facility will enable the university to facilitate interaction with its local communities and will play strongly to the agenda to widen participation (many university museums and galleries are at the forefront of delivering on the WP agenda). A bridge-head between arts and sciences will ensure a wider support base in the UoE and provide a means by which scientists can engage the public more imaginatively and more effectively. These are possibilities, if the UoE is interested in exploring them further, to which CCANW can bring significant added value.

What CCANW could bring to the University

CCANW can bring an outward looking perspective and act as an important bridge between the University and the general public. Our programmes are rigorously researched and based on good science as well artistic innovation. CCANW has a unique and distinctive methodology. Our programming is rooted in a range of academic research partnerships and we believe that our experience could make an

important contribution to facilitating public engagement with challenging subjects to the general public and to students.

Whilst the University has land, infrastructure and capital, CCANW brings experience and a record of attracting steady, diverse revenue funding for its exhibitions and learning programmes for which the University may not be eligible.

Its Director has experience of establishing two major contemporary art galleries and could contribute to teaching on the Art History, Visual Culture and other courses. CCANW's staff have worked as a team for six years, during which time their skills in programme planning and delivery, in education, fundraising, marketing and administration have been well honed.

CCANW's recently elected Chairman, Tristram Besterman, led a major university museum for over a decade, during which time it became an industry leader for innovation in the way it served the research and teaching functions of the university (in arts and sciences), was a popular and accessible portal between the university and local communities, provided a hugely popular service to the region and contributed to the university's international profile. He also raised £21million for its capital refurbishment.

A way forward?

Should the UoE be seriously interested in exploring a closer strategic relationship with CCANW, a formally constituted joint working group, with a remit to conduct an options appraisal for both partners might be one way forward. Various forms of strategic collaboration might be considered from co-commissioning to complete merger, with a number of alternative options between.

If at this stage we can agree on the importance of innovation, sustainability and mutual benefit as commonly held aims, then forming a joint working group to test ideas for a strategic alliance seems a sensible way to proceed.