

SCIENCE/ ART COLLABORATIONS

A Practical Guide

by Simon Watt



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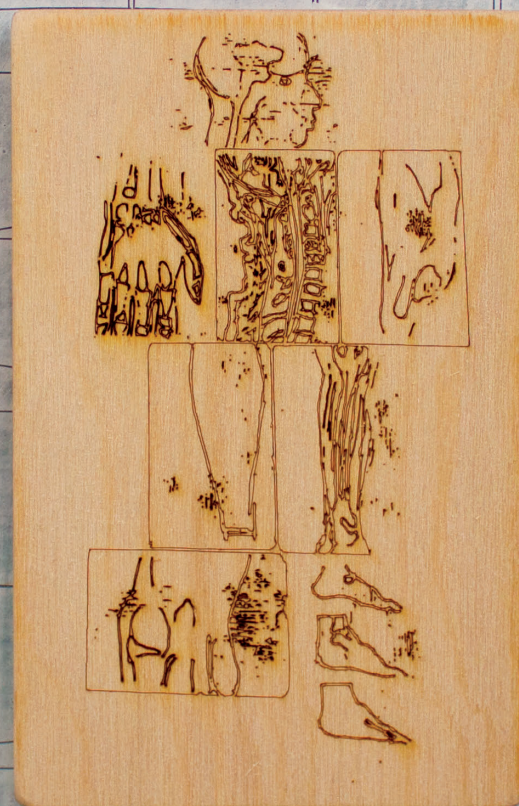
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Since 2020 the Wellcome/EPSRC Centre for Interventional and Surgical Science (WEISS) at University College London (UCL) has conducted many arts-based public engagement projects and greatly developed this side of its practice into a methodology that it continues to use today.

This document is intended as a practical guide; sharing the general framework that we now use when approaching such projects and providing a selection of case studies of where this framework was developed and employed.

WEISS has a public engagement strategy with four core aims. Our artistic collaborations have furthered the two below aims in particular:

- Public and patient stakeholders have opportunities to inform research throughout the research cycle, through constructive dialogue and mutual learning.
- Our public engagement is designed collaboratively, involving relevant people outside of higher education to create and design opportunities. Such as cultural partners, patient support groups and medical professionals.

We did not have a standing start, and much of this methodology drew from work already conducted at UCL, particularly the East London based Trellis scheme, the Dear World Project and from my (Simon Watt, WEISS Public Engagement Manager) own practice as an artist and public engagement professional. This methodology is far from set in stone, and we will continue to learn and experiment.

CONTEXT

WHY ART?



"Artists see things in a very different way to engineers; there's a lot of potential to learn and create new things neither could do independently."

Researcher who took part in the SURGE programme.

Art is a fantastic method of expression and a means to see the world, and ourselves, anew. It can be used as a means of play and exploration. It can aid focus, assist articulation, and help us communicate. There is a long tradition of collaboration between science and the arts, and arts workshops have been used successfully in public and community engagement by universities, societies, museums and cultural hubs the world over. Importantly, it is a method that many of our researchers were keen to explore and the WEISS public engagement team sought to harness this enthusiasm.

Art, as a process and output, can be interesting and fun. This can attract participants; both researchers, collaborators as well as the publics we want to engage. It can break down barriers, allowing people a degree of removal that can help them to talk about trauma or difficult matters. The outputs can be useful, either as graphic design, artistic metaphor, a way of explaining a concept to an audience, or as a focal point for further discussion. Collaborating with artists from a community can be a way of making in-roads to and learning more about and from that community.

WHY NOT TO USE ART

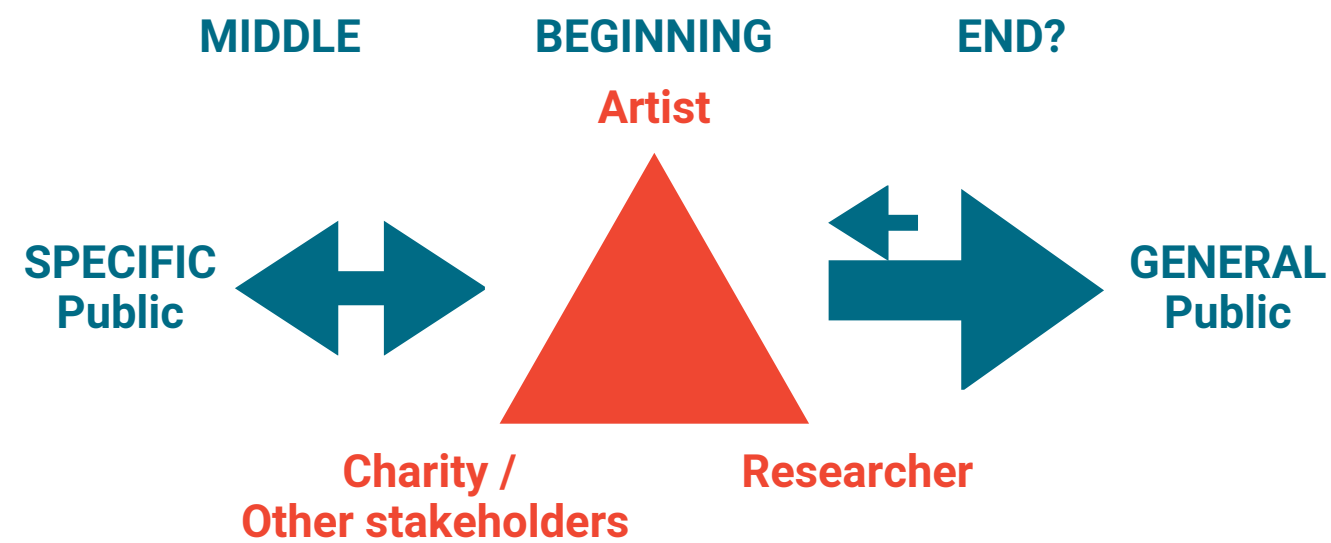
The arts are sometimes fetishized within the communications and engagement spheres. Bunting an artist on a project will not fix all its problems. Artists are not automatically more socially engaged, capable of facilitation or clearer communicators than anyone else. Furthermore, the arts and cultural world can come with its own barriers. They can appear too intimidating, too abstract or exclusive for some to want to, or feel able to, engage with. Sadly, there are many for whom a gallery, museum or theatre feels like somewhere that they are not welcome. These are often the same people who are excluded from science and research too.

The final output even if from a terrific project and of high quality may still not be liked. And that is fine.

Art will always be viewed by some, as a waste of time, money or resource. They are usually wrong.



HOW DO OUR PROJECTS WORK?



In general, the more equilateral the above triangle feels the better. It is possible to, and we have, run projects with limited input from charities/other stakeholders, but those projects where we can widen the core project team tend to perform better. In an ideal project, all involved will grow and learn from each other as well as the workshop participants. Though increasing the number of stakeholders so that the project is of more benefit to a wider group is often valuable, it can increase the amount of time and logistical input needed.

At WEISS we find that generally each phase takes 3-4 months meaning that the whole process can take 9 months to 1 year. Our projects generally cost about £4000. This breaks down as £3000 to pay the artist for their fee and expenses and £1000 to pay workshop participants, fund associated events, and to share the artistic outputs and resources. These costings were for 2001 to 2003, and will doubtless change with time.

Researchers have told us that, in total the time spent on these projects is usually between 1 or 2 weeks. Most have said they enjoyed the process so much that they wish they had more time to spend on them.

When?		Who?		
Project Phase	Project Stage	Artist	Researchers	Publics/ Patient group
1. Creating a team (beginning)	Match making	Collaborators and stakeholders are identified and brought together.		
2. Engaging with a specific public (middle)	Project Development	Artists and researchers develop an arts facilitated workshop for a specific public.		Public Engagement professionals support the collaboration to find and recruit appropriate participants for the workshop. If working with charities and other stakeholders, then they too can be involved with the process of workshop development and participant recruitment.
	Workshop	Workshop lead and facilitated by artist.	Researchers, other stakeholders and members of chosen public take part in the workshop creating their own art and taking part in discussions together.	
3. Engaging with a wider public (end?)	Creating the Artistic Output	Artist creates final artwork(s) using the materials and/or ideas, opinions and questions generated in the workshop. Outputs belong to the artist. Digital resources created have a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International (CC BY-SA 4.0) licence.	Researchers remain open and available for further consultation and collaboration.	
	Final sharing	The final piece is shared with all involved in the project and a wider, more general, public inviting further thoughts and reflections and potential further development.		

PHASE 1 CREATING A TEAM

HOW DO YOU FIND RESEARCHERS?

Researchers often have many and competing demands on their time, so if advertising a project it is best to be explicit and upfront about how much of their time will be needed.

In most cases we have invited expressions of interest from our community highlighting what they will gain from the process and the support they will have. In many cases, in order to create a route of accountability and understanding we ask for formal confirmation that the researcher has asked for permission to take part from their supervisor or line manager.

Even with a strong culture of engagement, our researchers are all coming from different starting points and so understanding of what success looks like to each of them can take time and work. As such we care more about trajectory than end point. For some, the process will still be more disseminative, and we can count meeting and holistically interacting with people outside of research and beginning their engagement journey as a win.

In our case, for healthcare engineers who inherently more distanced from patients than their clinical colleagues, simply meeting with patients and other people that their work could affect can be a transformative experience and give them motivation to further their work. For others, the opportunities created working with artists and the public can directly influence the direction of their research.

"I had these preconceptions before that were clearly wrong and now I have a different perspective... It's very eye opening."

WEISS researcher Richard Colchester, from the Surge Online Gallery Launch

HOW DO YOU FIND ARTISTS?

There have been 3 main ways that we have used to find artists.

1. Advertising on Arts Jobs

ArtsJobs.org.uk is the main place where vacancies and events in the arts and culture sector are shared in the UK. You can join and list a commission that will be shared on their website and mailing list.

2. Collaborating with an arts institution

In our case we have worked time and again with the University of the Arts London, Post Graduate Community team. They too seek interesting collaborations and opportunities. They connected us to a pool of talent that has been particularly suited to our needs. By virtue of being emerging artists they have tended to be available, affordable and at a stage in their career where they are most able to grow and learn through collaborating with us.

3. Head hunting

We have actively sought out artists whose methods has a particular synergy with the work of our researchers or who are already embedded in or working with communities we wish to engage with.

When advertising opportunities we have made it clear that we care more about the workshop, the process of creating the art and how it engages with our primary specific audiences than the final output. We have found saying that we are seeking artists with a "socially engaged practice" has often helped us find the kinds of collaborators we are looking for.

MATCHMAKING

In some cases, particularly for our Surge programme we have run matchmaking events where, after an initial expression of interest selected artists and researchers are invited to meet each other in the hope of forming a collaboration. The events usually last 2-3 hours and involve up to 20 people. Typically, we have had more artists than researchers applying but we have made sure that the ratio of artists to researchers has never been more than 3 to 1, striving for as close to parity as we can. At these events potential partners meet, learn about and inspire each other in a way that is interesting and fun enough so that even those who do not proceed past this stage have learned from and enjoyed the experience. One of the ways we know the matchmaking sessions work is that there have been several instances where projects that were not funded through the Surge scheme have still proceeded independently in other ways. In other instances, we have found artists at these events that we have come back to work with at a later date.

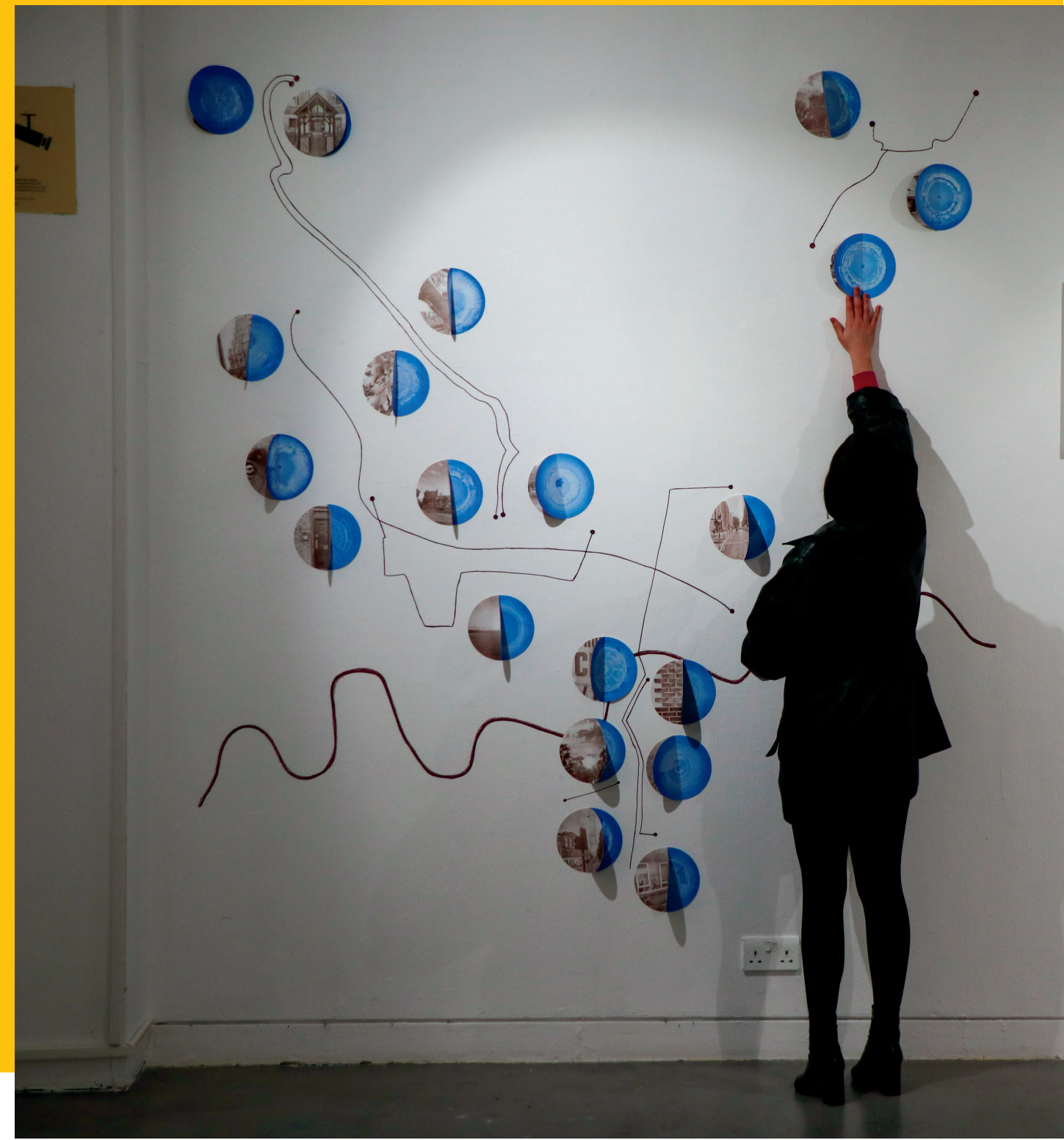
To help everyone get to know each other, all attendees are asked to introduce themselves and their work to the group for 1 minute. After this, everyone has 1 minute to share with and talk to the group about an image that inspires them. We have tried various exercises after this, including setting challenges to groups or speed-dating-like carousels. Of equal importance to these more formalised means of enabling everyone to connect has been allowing time, space, food and drink after the event so that people can mix, chat and reconnect with each other in a more social setting. This may look simple and informal, but it is still best practice to prepare for this networking session.

We then ask artists and researchers to each send us a list of the top 3-5 people they would like to work with and a list of up to 3 that they definitely would not like to work with. Behind the scenes, we analyse the matches and connect artists and researchers inviting them to submit an application for a full project. We know that the process of application is a valuable learning experience but can still be time consuming and requires skill and effort and so we pay each artist a £50 honorarium if they apply with a collaborative project.

"I really enjoyed today and think it was chaired [and] hosted very well. I've done more of these zoom calls than I care to remember now and this was definitely the most interesting and thought provoking. A real pleasure to hear about everyone's work."

Feedback from artist participant of our matchmaking workshop.

This one was conducted online at the height of the Covid 19 lockdowns.



*"Thanks for the opportunity to contribute to this.
Is very interesting!"*

*Steering committee member,
a member of the public*



The process of selecting which projects go ahead is a chance for public engagement in and of itself. For the selection process we usually assemble a judging panel made up of public engagement professionals, artists and people representing our target publics. In the future we hope to draw more upon the alumni of previous projects, inviting back artists, researchers, other stakeholders and patient/public participants to join such judging panels.

We have asked judges to use the below questions to help assess if a project is worth funding.

1. Are patients/publics engaged in the process of the creation of the art?
2. Is it clear what the team want to communicate to the public?
3. Is it clear what the team want to learn from the public?
4. Does the artistic output have the potential to spread the core messages and learning further, to a wider public? Could it be/have a good legacy for the project?
5. Does the budget look well-thought-out and realistic with regards to their proposal?

For each of the above criteria we ask the judges to score the project from 0 to 4, where 0 means not at all and 4 means very much so. Following this the panel has a short discussion to help finally decide which projects to fund.

JUDGING



PHASE 2 ENGAGING WITH A SPECIFIC PUBLIC

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

In this phase of the project, the commissioned artists and researchers develop their project together, devising a workshop that will happen with a specific public. They consider who are the people they want to engage with, what they want to learn from them and what they need to share with them to make this possible. In general this should be the people who their research affects. At this point other stakeholders, usually charities, can also have an input so that the workshop and artistic output might be of use to them too.

While this is going on, public engagement professionals do their best to recruit workshop participants. This can be a challenge and working with charities, community groups and using forums like the People in Research website are a great help.

"[I was very surprised by] how willing to talk about personal experiences people were, particularly around what must have been pretty challenging experiences in their life."

*a researcher
who took part in an arts mediated workshop with heart patients*

THE WORKSHOP

Ideally, the workshop is lead by the artist(s) with everyone else taking part as participants. Here art is useful as it is something that "expert" researcher and participants are both naïve to and so helps break down the ivory tower while giving everyone the shared goal of creation. Furthermore, the use of art can allow people to articulate themselves in a way they might not otherwise. This can be particularly useful for engagement with patients who might be talking about moving or traumatic experiences. On multiple occasions, bereaved carers have remarked how taking part in our workshops have played a positive role in their process of grieving.

"The whole concept was very exciting, and I enjoyed engaging."

"I think I learnt more about myself through engaging in the session, it was very therapeutic."

"I wanted to say how excited I am about your work. I love the idea of combining Art and Science and for me it's about translation and interpretation combining with feelings and emotions."

Feedback from workshop participants

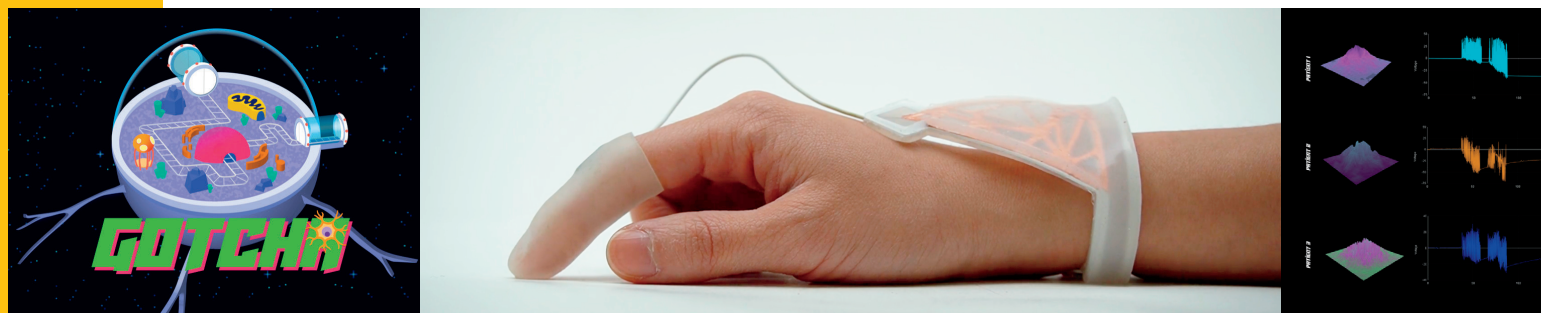


PHASE 3

ENGAGING WITH A WIDER PUBLIC

CREATING THE ARTISTIC OUTPUT

The artist, aided by the researcher and other stakeholders where appropriate, then uses the learning, themes and materials generated from the workshop to create their own artistic response. Where possible we seek that the output is useful, something that for instance could be used as graphic design for a stakeholder or be displayed in an appropriate public forum. Ideally this should be built in from the start of the process.



"To any scientist considering getting involved in something like this... This is a fantastic opportunity to meet different people, to exchange ideas, and perhaps create something that might drive that change in the world that we all need... Trust me you will enjoy it."

*WEISS researcher, Tijana Jevtic Vojinovic,
from the Surge Online Gallery Launch*

FINAL SHARING

The final artworks should be shared in a way that everyone who took part in the workshop see them. The display of the outputs become a focal point to share the process of creation and what has been shared and learned by all involved along the way. In an ideal world it is shared in a way that allows the specific public's voice to be amplified within its community, so that others who those stories resonate with are engaged, and outside of that community so that their experiences are shared and understood more widely too.

In general, the artist keeps this art. They are likely in a much better position for long-term sharing of the work, and we are happy if it benefits them in any other way. In many cases the work has been donated to us or other partners and we have sought other ways of sharing it more widely.

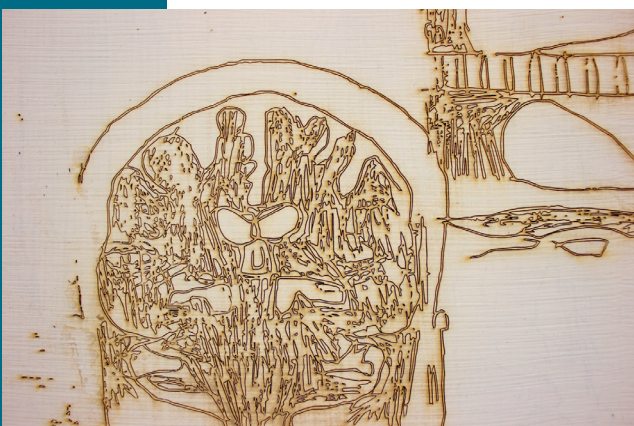
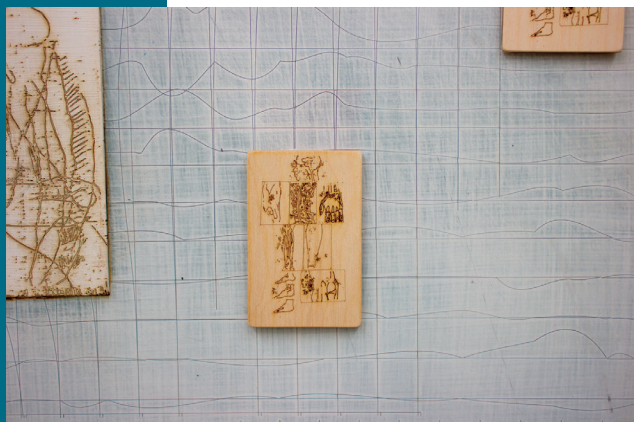
All the digital outputs, such as videos, photographs, or written work are produced under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International (CC BY-SA 4.0) licence. This is so that they can be freely used by, the artist, researcher, other stakeholders, the funders, all workshop attendees, and spread more widely into the world. It is also because we believe that because the process is so collaborative that it cannot be said to have been made by one person. We know a project has really worked if it feels like it was worthwhile even if no one saw the final output.

We have displayed work in a shop window, in hospitals, in online galleries, and in a pop-up installation. This part of the process can be expensive, so it is important that the input you put in is proportional to the output you desire.

If more money is available, it is often beneficial to keep a small fund back to support what could be a second phase of work to emerge from some projects. We are currently working on a "Continuing Excellence" fund to enable further and deeper engagement in such cases.



PRACTICAL TIPS?



Build in time for things going wrong; they often do.

There is a tendency for researchers to want to focus more on educational groups or young people and this should usually be resisted. Youth groups are often thought of as a captive audience, and anything done in the name of education and inspiring the next generation of scientist is perceived as positive. But even if these aims, particularly when they widen participation or target underserved audiences, are laudable, they are seldom the group that the researchers' work directly affects, or that researchers can learn from in a way that will shape and improve their research. Furthermore, those aims of education and widening participation are often tackled more efficiently and effectively by other organisations specifically aiming to address these issues such as the British Science Association or In2Science. As such, though we encourage working with young people elsewhere, we push our researchers to consider exactly who they can learn from and who their work will affect. We then strive to help them connect with these specific people.

Do not attempt to run schemes like those discussed in this guide on the cheap. Asking people to work for exposure or experience is exploitative.



CASE STUDY

REHAP

This project was part of Surge; a collaboration between WEISS and the University of the Arts, London Postgraduate Community. WEISS's Tijana Jevtic Vojinovic and artist Janet Choi sought to engage with people affected by stroke. They held a workshop with carers and took inspiration from rehabilitative and assistive tools and techniques to imagine what they could look like in the future. Through this process they sought to interrogate people's relationship with the healthcare tools they use. For instance, it was noticed that while some people wanted assistive technologies to be unobtrusive in appearance, something where its use could be noticed as little as possible, others wanted tools that were customisable, where the appearance could reflect their personality.

Exploring the concepts behind mirror therapy and imaging what rehabilitative tools of the future might look like, Janet used 3D printing to create prototypes. With these objects she produced photographs and a faux advertisement.

The artistic outputs, as well as being shared online were displayed at Central St Martins as part of Janet's degree show, at the Surge 2 gallery in the London College of Communication, and featured as part of the artworks used to prompt discussion and sharing at the 2021 UCL World Stroke Day Forum events.

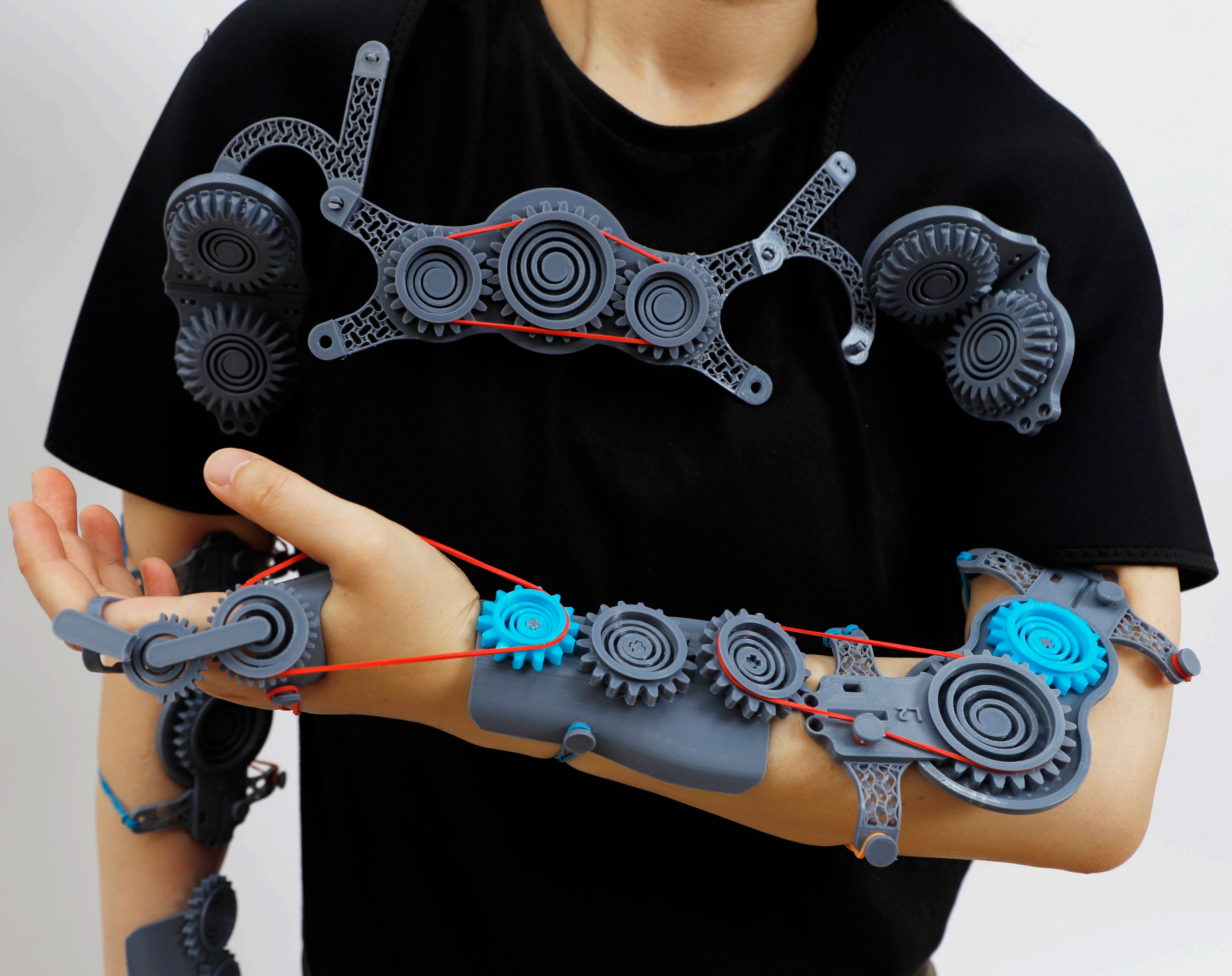
"There is merit in drawing in an artist for the design of this sort of intervention. Well done in incorporating PPI"

*Workshop attendee,
a carer for someone affected by stroke*

"[Without this project] I would not have considered aesthetics and the relationship of the patient [to the tools I help create] as much"

*WEISS researcher, Tijana Jevtic Vojinovic,
from the Surge mid-project critique*





CASE STUDY INTERFACING

WEISS researcher Ester Bonmati collaborated with artist Molly Macleod to create a workshop to bring scientists and the public together to discuss the current role of data and artificial intelligence in research to diagnose and treat pancreatic cancer. The aim of the workshop was to spark new conversations and re-frame the context of qualitative research whilst creating a piece of new artwork that represented this.

For the workshop the team were joined by Clinical Research Fellow at WEISS & UCL Alexander Ney, Professor of Hepatology & Gastroenterology at UCL Stephen Pereira and four people who had been carers for someone with, and lost someone because of, pancreatic cancer. Everyone was sent an arts pack in the post beforehand and Molly led the session on Zoom. The pack contained materials for cyanotyping, an early form of photographic printing.

The workshop acted as a safe and open online space to discuss the use of personal data in a medical research setting while explaining its current role in training AI models to diagnose and predict pancreatic cancer at an earlier stage. It also encouraged candid conversations about the worries and fears surrounding the concept of sharing personal data, using the visual cues and questions as a vehicle to guide what can be very personal and difficult topics to talk about openly with strangers.

Through a series of qualitative research questions participants created their own 'data self-portraits'. Molly then microscopically photographed the self-portraits to create a dataset of 1000 images. This dataset was then used to train an AI model similar to those currently used by medical researchers to improve early diagnosis of pancreatic cancer. This created a film of new, shifting, hybrid images that represent how the scale of datasets used in medical research unify the contributors as they become anonymized by the process, representing the disparity between the macrocosm of big data and the microcosm of personalised individual patient care. This film is a collaboration between artificial intelligence, artist, medical researchers, and those affected by pancreatic cancer. The film and a series of nine images were displayed at the London College of Communication and in the foyer of Charles Bell House, where WEISS is based, in honour of Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month. It also featured in the November 2021 edition of Interlalia Magazine.

"We've all learnt a valuable lesson about the gaps that need to be bridged between patients and their carers, clinicians and researchers as part of our mutual efforts! Working more closely together is priceless!"

UCL clinical research fellow Alexander Ney

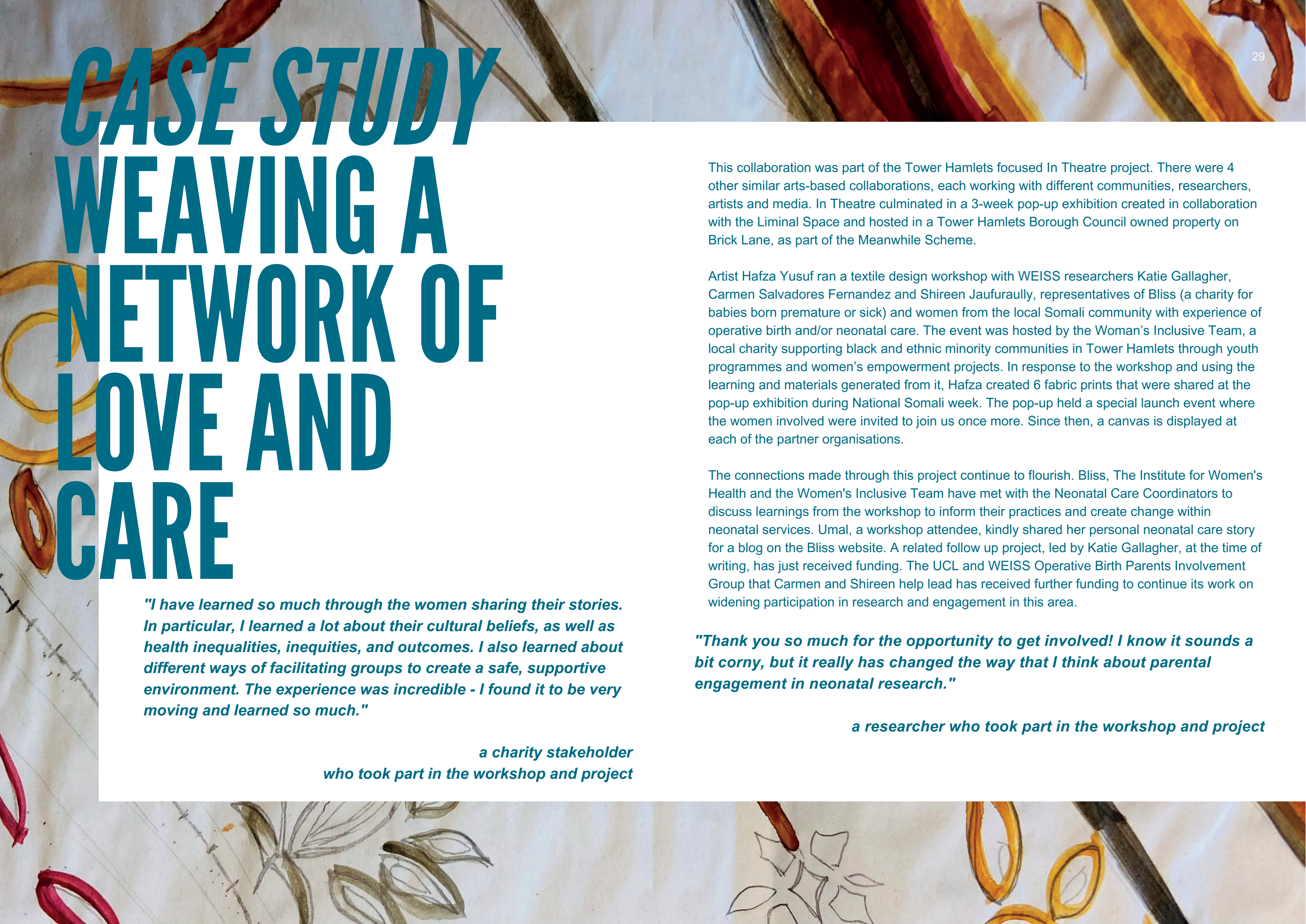
"It was great to take part in this work and I find the film quite haunting."

PPI participant

"I am already using some of the things I learned [from the PPI group] to inform how I write patient information booklets."

WEISS researcher, Ester Bonmati

**WE ARE ALL TRYING TO WORK
TOWARDS THE SAME GOAL**



CASE STUDY WEAVING A NETWORK OF LOVE AND CARE

"I have learned so much through the women sharing their stories. In particular, I learned a lot about their cultural beliefs, as well as health inequalities, inequities, and outcomes. I also learned about different ways of facilitating groups to create a safe, supportive environment. The experience was incredible - I found it to be very moving and learned so much."

*a charity stakeholder
who took part in the workshop and project*

This collaboration was part of the Tower Hamlets focused In Theatre project. There were 4 other similar arts-based collaborations, each working with different communities, researchers, artists and media. In Theatre culminated in a 3-week pop-up exhibition created in collaboration with the Liminal Space and hosted in a Tower Hamlets Borough Council owned property on Brick Lane, as part of the Meanwhile Scheme.

Artist Hafza Yusuf ran a textile design workshop with WEISS researchers Katie Gallagher, Carmen Salvadores Fernandez and Shireen Jaufuraully, representatives of Bliss (a charity for babies born premature or sick) and women from the local Somali community with experience of operative birth and/or neonatal care. The event was hosted by the Woman's Inclusive Team, a local charity supporting black and ethnic minority communities in Tower Hamlets through youth programmes and women's empowerment projects. In response to the workshop and using the learning and materials generated from it, Hafza created 6 fabric prints that were shared at the pop-up exhibition during National Somali week. The pop-up held a special launch event where the women involved were invited to join us once more. Since then, a canvas is displayed at each of the partner organisations.

The connections made through this project continue to flourish. Bliss, The Institute for Women's Health and the Women's Inclusive Team have met with the Neonatal Care Coordinators to discuss learnings from the workshop to inform their practices and create change within neonatal services. Umal, a workshop attendee, kindly shared her personal neonatal care story for a blog on the Bliss website. A related follow up project, led by Katie Gallagher, at the time of writing, has just received funding. The UCL and WEISS Operative Birth Parents Involvement Group that Carmen and Shireen help lead has received further funding to continue its work on widening participation in research and engagement in this area.

"Thank you so much for the opportunity to get involved! I know it sounds a bit corny, but it really has changed the way that I think about parental engagement in neonatal research."

a researcher who took part in the workshop and project



CASE STUDY

art x ART

This project was part of the second iteration of Surge; WEISS's collaboration with the University of the Arts, London Postgraduate Community.

WEISS researcher Chloe He collaborated with artist Iris Tsang and participants from the LGBTQ+ community. They sought to explore the family planning journeys of 6 diverse individuals through the collection and narration of oral histories and lived experiences in order to better understand the personal and collective barriers related to infertility, and de-mythicise and de-stigmatise some aspects of Assisted Reproductive Technology. Studies have noted that LGBTQ+ individuals are among the fastest growing users of fertility care but there are significantly fewer studies focusing on this population and the systemic barriers faced by sexual and gender minority groups are often unknown by fertility care providers. These issues and related topics were discussed in a series of textile workshops, the outputs of which were then sewn together to create a tapestry that was displayed in the window the Surge Pop-Up Street Gallery on Brick Lane, at the Surge exhibition at the London College of Communication and on the UAL Without Form online platform. At time of writing a follow up piece of engagement work is currently being planned.



"I didn't know I could create artworks like this."

"I did not know family means so much to me, talking through the session helps me to articulate that. It feels very therapeutic."

Feedback from workshop participants.





THANKS TO

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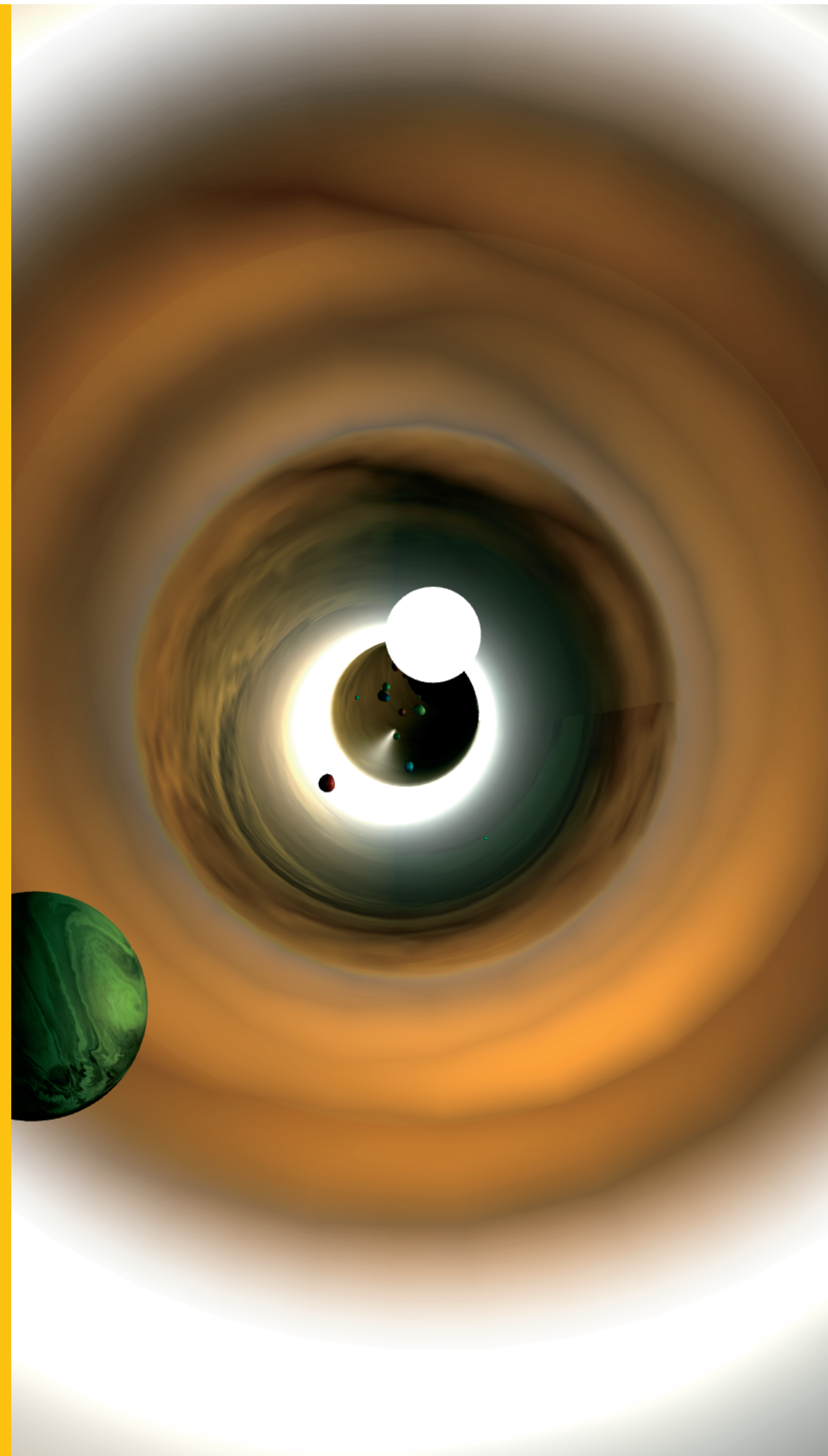


IMAGE CREDITS

Front and back covers, pages 28-31

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Pages 11-13, 34-36

Photographs taken by Catriona Mahmoud, University of the Arts, london.

