

**“Every single
thing out
there is telling
you not to do
it”**

**How CVAN EM
invests in the
visual arts of
the future**

Case Study - Talent

Talent

CVAN EM is the Contemporary Visual Arts Network for the East Midlands. Our mission is to strengthen and develop the contemporary visual arts sector in the region, working to safeguard the future of artists and our sector as a whole.

We are a catalyst for new ways of supporting arts practice, regional connectivity and audience engagement. Using the small size of our organisation to our advantage, we experiment, innovate and adapt our approach in order to meet the needs of our network and contribute to a flourishing visual arts habitat where artists, organisations and audiences prosper.

We recognise that a successful regional arts sector depends on a thriving, connected network of artists and a healthy pipeline of future talent. In our most recent programme (2015-18), we delivered a number of projects and events which developed and showcased the talent of artists living and working in the East Midlands, and nurtured the next generation of practitioners.

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Document enabled CVAN EM to work intensively with six regional artists and invest in them at a pivotal moment in their careers. They agreed to shine a light on their creative process, capturing their experiences in their own words and giving audiences an insight into what it means to be an artist.

With an investment of around £4,500 for each artist over a two-year period, we created professional development opportunities including practical workshops, visits to international exhibitions and events, such as documenta 14, and opportunities to collaborate with writers, academics, curators and mentors. We supported the artists in reflecting on their practices and motivations through documentation, interviews, filming and discussion.

A challenging but beneficial project for all six participants, Document built the artists' confidence in their practice and fostered relationships across the East Midlands region. It also led to a fruitful partnership between CVAN EM and the CAMEo research institute at the University of Leicester, with insights from Document feeding into the institute's work on employment within the cultural industries.



“Being paid to document what I do has made it a priority, and documenting has changed the way I view my work ... It’s given the small, normally unseeable things I do value.”

“the project has given me the confidence to think of myself as a ‘proper’ artist and to understand how I fit into the larger creative economy”

The rich legacy of the project includes six compelling short films, a specially commissioned essay, a feature in Arts Professional and a final exhibition, shown at Artcore in Derby. Thanks to these outputs, the artists, the project and CVAN EM gained wide exposure. Other artists welcomed Document, saying that they found validation and encouragement in the project's messages.

The Document content has been particularly well received by students, who found the films and the myth-busting, poster-style publication On Being an Artist a valuable opportunity to discuss career trajectories and learn from positive role models. One undergraduate at the University of Derby credits the honesty and clarity of the Document films with her decision to apply for a residency at Artcore in Derby, which she was awarded.

In addition, the strong partnership with CAMEo established during the project led to a successful application to the Midlands 4 Cities Doctoral Training Partnership for funding for a post-doctoral research post in 2019.



What the future holds

We have an ambitious agenda for the next few years. Building on the achievements of our 2015-18 programme, our future activities will continue to support talent development in the East Midlands by focusing on the growth of an artistic career and exploring how a region can nurture its artists, from school to higher education, post-graduation, and throughout their careers.

We recognise that the whole visual arts sector has a part to play in enabling that development. As part of our forthcoming programme It takes a region to raise an artist, we will concentrate on partnership building, forging new relationships with higher education institutions, the gallery education sector and other cultural organisations in order to investigate how collaborative working can contribute to increased artistic growth in the East Midlands.

All we need now is the continued investment to expand our ambition and influence.

<http://cvaneastmidlands.co.uk/>
#ItTakesARegionTo



Contemporary Visual Arts Network East Midlands

Image credits

Andrew Bracey speaking at The Life & Times of a Visual Artist, 2018 for Document. Photography: Lamar Francois

Geoff Litherland on location, 2017 for Document. Photography: Bill Newsinger

Tracey Kershaw & Chiara Dellerba installing On Being An Artist, 2018 for Document

Kajal Nisha Patel journal. Photography courtesy the artist