

Bluecoat Artistic Policy

The purpose of this document is to:

- Share the thinking that shapes our artistic programming choices and makes us distinctive;
- Explain to staff, artists and interested audiences the kinds of work we do, and why;
- Influence all areas of our work in delivering our mission *to provide exceptional contemporary arts experiences*.

Our artistic policy is: to map, reflect, influence and share current and future tendencies in the visual, literary and performing arts.

We are interested in work that:

- Is risk-taking and experimental;
- Resonates with local, national and international issues, audiences, communities and artistic practice;
- Uses multi-artform approaches and works in hybrid, emerging or new areas of artistic practice;
- Contributes to developing an expansive set of artistic practices - at Bluecoat, in Liverpool and in the North;
- Sets vernacular cultures in an international context by creating encounters between Liverpool and the world;
- Develops or embraces multi-generational perspectives;
- Explores one of our 'lines of enquiry,' which currently comprise: reflection on artistic practice, art's social engagement, cultural diversity, heritage, examining modernism and the legacy of modernity, twenty-first century debates.

What we mean by 'contemporary' and 'exceptional'

For us, 'contemporary' means that our programme is informed by current art practice and ideas, is aware of new developments emerging globally and new modes of art-making influenced by technology or new social, cultural, political and economic conditions. We also acknowledge the importance of revisiting, responding to and re-examining the past.

'Exceptional' experiences for our audiences are ones that stimulate, move, inform and actively engage - whether they are 'live', digital, in print or through reputation and critical reception. We also seek 'exceptional' experiences for the artists we work with, offering developmental opportunities that are specific to the Bluecoat and the city with its unique contexts and communities of interest.

We recognise that not all experiences can be exceptional for everybody but the desire for exceptionality reflects our ambition, and it is what makes Bluecoat distinctive.

Our artistic policy is based upon the following principles:

- Bluecoat is a culturally distinctive organisation in a city with a particular feel and character. Our artistic programming reflects and respects this distinctiveness. We want our work to be internationally connected, diverse, social, ambitious and in search of both beauty and debate: the aesthetic and the discursive.
- Bluecoat is a welcoming space where people can create and share exceptional arts experiences and explore the world through their responses. We encourage both light and deep engagement with the arts.
- Bluecoat is committed to reflecting and enhancing creative and cultural diversity through our programmes and our partnerships with particular groups, which currently include deaf and disabled artists and audiences and specific local communities such as Liverpool's Arab communities.
- We are committed to relationships with artists that support the rigorous development of their practice over time.
- We not only champion timeliness and quality but seek to foreground the singular, the surprising, the exceptions to the rule.

In practice this means that our programme:

- Includes exhibitions, events, debates, projects, commissions, festivals, off-site and virtual projects, education and participation activities. These are primarily curated by us with contributions from carefully considered partnerships and relationships with artists, venues, festivals, independent curators, promoters or community organisations. We are always open to suggestions of how we might integrate artforms that we do not currently present;
- Includes professional and critically-engaged artistic practice alongside recreational and self-motivated learning;
- Is structured in seasons across the year as well as for longer periods, to create a rhythm that artists and audiences can get to know, varying and punctuating that rhythm on occasions with special events, festivals and programmes that respond to local events or issues. In this way, we aspire to be habit-forming: repeat visits by those coming to, or working with us, can lead to reflection and deeper experiences for audiences.

Measures

We will know this Artistic Policy is working if:

- Interesting and exciting people (artists, promoters, organisations, partners, venues etc.) want to work with us;
- Our work reaches an audience who have a strong emotional, spiritual, intellectual, recreational, or social response to it;
- People tell us and others that Bluecoat was crucial to their artistic development;
- Our artists, audiences, peers and partners tell us we're living up to our principles;
- We find ourselves doing something we hadn't expected as a result of talking to audiences, artists or partners;
- We are proud of the programme even if not everything has worked;
- Audiences for core activities such as the visual arts grow year on year and new audiences for the other art forms emerge and consistently engage with us.

Key elements of our own idea of artistic quality include identifying all or some the following qualities:

- Ambition
- Originality
- Resonance
- Technical proficiency
- Connection
- Personal impact

To find this out we will:

- Carry out regular surveys of our audience and their feedback on their experiences;
- Create informal ways for people to tell us how they respond to our work;
- Carry out regular self-assessment on our programme, its success or otherwise, and the range of artists, groups and partners we work with and the reviews that the programme generates;
- Talk to people formally and informally about how they think we are putting this policy into action;
- Use regular peer assessments, including ACE artistic assessments.

The key measurements will be:

- Audience satisfaction (via audience survey);
- New audiences;
- Repeat attendance (via audience survey);
- Number and nature of comments via feedback mechanisms, social media etc. (via comments cards, social media analysis);
- Stakeholder/partner satisfaction (via annual survey of artists/partners etc.);
- Peer assessment ratings (via ACE artistic assessments, key critical friends and reviews).

These findings, both those that can be quantified, such as audience satisfaction levels, and those that are more qualitative, will be used to inform artistic and broader organisational planning.

March 2015