How do you currently operate?

〈...〉 Rhubaba is a charity and artist run organisation established in 2009 to offer studio provision for recent graduates and to create a space dedicated to the production and presentation of contemporary art ... the gallery and studio spaces closed in the summer 2021, but we continue to run an online programme and support artists to develop residencies, commissions and temporary projects ... we are supported by a board of trustees 〈...〉

〈...〉 Rhubaba functions as a non hierarchical committee ... there's no assigned roles ... it's a revolving committee with a maximum term of three years – the committee leads all aspects of the programme and support network 〈...〉

〈...〉 The artist is a worker, either underpaid or completely voluntary ... often overworked and juggling multiple jobs ... this creates quite an unstable workplace ... we're interested in examining the problems and thinking about how artist-run spaces can be more sustainable, or how they can foster more opportunities for people who wouldn't have the support structures in place to facilitate unpaid labour – whether it be a direct economic or time issue 〈...〉

〈...〉 This is a shared discussion that we've had with various collaborative groups since being part of the five artist space pilot project ... we've looked at reparative work for artists and how that is also linked to decolonising economics ... even within non hierarchical spaces, there's still a racial hierarchy and there's also capitalist and ableist systems – this session won't resolve any of this, because it's a much bigger problem, but a plurality of voices needs to come together to discuss this ... the work focuses on challenging forms of existing knowledge, to instead hold spaces to explore and invest in more felt and lived sources of knowledge 〈...〉

What is decolonising economics?

〈...〉 To decolonise is to contextualise – decolonising is the process of undoing colonial practices within a system, be it education, music, fashion, culture, bread baking, ... but in order to decolonise, we first must understand what the process of colonisation has been and what impact it has had on the systems and structures we are engaging in ... uncovering the history of the economic system enables us to better understand what structural inequality is – how it operates and why it is by no means inevitable, but an outcome of the economic system by its very design... decolonising invites us to interrogate the narratives, attitudes and beliefs that influence what we value in society, and therefore where we see patterns of wealth and privilege exist 〈...〉

〈...〉 There are historical roots of racial inequalities that permeate the everyday lives of people of colour communities, and all vulnerable and disadvantaged people ... building this thinking into how our current institutions make policy decisions will help to actively reshape the economy into one that benefits us all 〈...〉

〈...〉 We need to explore and understand an economy that is based on sustainability, equity and justice ... create a space that has a regenerative relationship with its natural resources ... upheld by a set of values that support caring – divest and invest 〈...〉

What are the most extractive activities in artist communities and what is the impact?

〈...〉 How sustainable are these artists run initiative models – with new funding we now have introduced fees for eight hours of our work a week, but we're still barely covering what we're really doing ... I don't think I've ever worked through Rhubaba without having two or more jobs ... having a gesture of a fee to cover some of our hours is a good start 〈...〉

〈...〉 We have to be careful because the attractiveness of the labour can disguise the exploitation of the work 〈...〉

〈...〉 The work is continual, we do not switch off – there is no holiday or sick pay 〈...〉

〈...〉 Much of the desire to develop this activity comes from a place of compassion and care and wanting to support artists, communities and wanting to produce a programme that is impactful and thoughtful and reflects relevant conversations within contemporary art communities ... however, our working issues and personal care are often not being supported by anyone else 〈...〉

〈...〉 There's a great deal of extraction and I think those economic practices show up covertly, but once you begin to analyse it, yes, it's really hard to ignore ... How do you undo this? ... many collectives don't have the time to sit and reflect about how this shows up 〈...〉

〈...〉 Our working model, that brought in a part sustainable funding through the rental of studios, has now been undermined by the redevelopment of our building through local gentrification – therefore our financial autonomy has gone / changed 〈...〉

〈...〉 We have to try to balance a committee with artists from different backgrounds to avoid a bias to 'privileged' individuals who can afford to volunteer 〈...〉

〈...〉 Balancing working structures between open non hierarchical committee and other institutionalised arts / education formats is difficult 〈...〉

〈...〉 Issues around time, around energy, around labour resources ... the expectations from our audience are high 〈...〉

〈...〉 Individualism, competition, speed and efficiency ... conflicts with the traditional understanding of growth and success 〈...〉

〈...〉 The allowance for time periods to properly complete tasks from a voluntary collective group – urgency over-riding accountability 〈...〉

〈...〉 We need to realign expectations and measures of professionalism 〈...〉

〈...〉 Having acknowledgement of your work ... ensuring that it is appropriately positioned in the organisation ... understanding the value ... Who do we value in our collectives? ... the issues around how an artist led initiative is funded and who is setting the agenda – whether things end up becoming output-lead with specific timings – How does this impact/restrict/change the people that are able to participate? 〈...〉

〈...〉 How as an artist led initiative you have to respond, or accommodate, if you want to partner with somebody else – maybe to share space ... and then there can be a conflict of organisational interests 〈...〉

〈...〉 Issues of isolation within a rural perspective ... how to negotiate hospitality and support structures for visiting artists that maybe require much more attention due to the location – to manage expectations ... how you can genuinely support a visiting artist in the community, putting them in a safe and productive space 〈...〉

What is the solidarity economy?

〈...〉 When we're trying to think of what an alternative looks like, it can be really hard to create a vision ... the solidarity economy is a term used to describe sustainable and equitable community control of work, food, housing, and culture using a variety of organisational forms ... the solidarity economy is focused on community ownership and governance 〈...〉

〈...〉 A key part of the solidarity economy is experimentation – trying out different models, trying community decision processes – it can be broken into 5 aspects: creation, production, exchange transfers, consumption and surplus allocation 〈...〉

In what ways can you foster community ownership in your artists-led initiatives and what can that look like?

〈...〉 This brings up that whole idea of artists collectives possibly moving more into the community, whereas they're often seen as operating separately ... trying to pull in those people that aren't necessarily arts based into their project ... actually having a more integrated approach about how one runs as an artist collective, and how creative practice moves into other social areas 〈...〉

〈...〉 The idea of cyclical growth ... each time you do something, giving time to reflective practice and moving ideas into this solidarity economy ... when a project is complete, rather than just signing the whole thing off and moving on to the next project, thinking about how we can learn from the activity and the relationships that we've started to build with the project partners 〈...〉

〈...〉 We need to challenge speed and time and urgency 〈...〉

〈...〉 A lot of the funding that exists at the moment doesn't allow for any risk taking ... we need to encourage experimentation and allow learning from failure 〈...〉

〈...〉 We've been having lots of conversations as a team and we don't want more responsibility, or more projects ... we want time to really focus on ways of working and key outcomes ... How do we manage the expectations from others? 〈...〉

〈...〉 It's really important that groups feedback to funders constructively – clearly articulate how you are feeling ... how funding is working and where it is creating problems or tension ... how this has possibly created a bigger / different problem ... to better understand the original intentions of funding and expectations ... there also needs to be an assurance that other groups are all equally honest ... to put aside competitiveness 〈...〉

〈...〉 Many of the institutional systems just seem to be repeating ... we need to have conversations about the design of the system and who it is supporting ... work with funders to really rethink the ways it can best fit artist-led group activity 〈...〉

〈...〉 It's an issue of actually recognising the scale of the problems, and the relationship of individual people to those problems – people feel disempowered ... it is a slow process of recognition in our own lives, to consider why certain processes are extractive or exploitative or oppressive ... but we also shouldn't put it on ourselves to fix the issues individually 〈...〉

〈...〉 It's isolating when you have these ideas of how things should work - you don't exist in a vacuum – if enough people come together, they'll change – you need to be the agent to create the solidarity – everyone has to participate 〈...〉

ONE SHARED OWNER

05

ARTISTS TALKING ABOUT REPARATIVE ECONOMIES

This is one of six posters. Each poster captures a number of questions that arose from a series of artist conversations that focused on the running of artist-led projects.

The posters are part of a larger research, survey and mapping project designed to create a stronger understanding and greater visibility of the range and uniqueness of collective artist-led practice across Scotland.

Alongside the Scottish Artists Union Learning Programme this conversation about reparative economies was led by Khadea Kuchenmeister, Natasha Thembiso Ruwona and Freya Yeates (committee members of Rhubaba, Edinburgh). Rhubaba were supported by invited speaker Nonhlanhla Makuyana (Decolonising Economics, London).

Khadea, Natasha and Freya explored ideas about decolonising economic systems and i
dentifying extractive activities and principles in their artist group practices - what does true community governance look like in an artist-led organisation? Nonhlanhla created a wider overview of community strategies that support ideas of a solidarity economy.

We hope that these focused thoughts will act as a point of self reflection for individual artists, or as a catalyst for future artist groups to openly share and build their own ideas.

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