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# ARTFUL ACTIVISM

A TOOLKIT FOR  
CREATIVE ACTIVISM

actionaid



UNIVERSITY  
*of York*



*“I’m interested in knowing what we can do differently to harness the power of arts and activism. I believe there is so much that we can do to learn, unlearn and relearn to advance how we work with artists. It takes me back to the workshop we had ... where activists felt we were closing their space with our various policies and restrictions. In short, we are doing NGO-isation of arts even before we fully embrace and understand their work or utilize the fullness of their potential in our campaigns and advocacy.”*

**DUNIYA KHANDOKER, ACTIONAID BANGLADESH**

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COVER IMAGE: ‘Keep Space Between Things’, bodymap by Zihan Karim from the Creative Activism Workshop, Chittagong, 2018. CREDIT: EMILIE FLOWER

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# INTRODUCTION:

# ART AND CREATIVE ACTIVISM

*“I never really saw myself as an activist but an artist. But perhaps what I can say is the workshop reawakened my need to make more careful art. More intentional art. Art that speaks more clearly than we usually allow. For me, meeting those activists inspired me. Listening to some of their stories made me bolder. I am not saying this just because it might appear nice in your report, but I am very sure my activism will be bolder in my work. There are activists who truly inspired me and made me question why I do not take enough risks for the things I believe in. So as an artist, I found that I need activism to remind me of why I do art and what I stand for.”*

**PATIENCE NITUMWESIGA, UGANDAN FILM-MAKER**

This toolkit is based on the findings of a three-year research process co-hosted by ActionAid, the Centre for Human Rights at the University of York in the UK, and partners in Uganda and Bangladesh. Known collectively as the Creative Arts and Activism project, this work entailed three distinct projects:<sup>1</sup>

- Creative Activism: Art and Development Alternatives Network Project (2016-2018)
- Pushing Back: Supporting Organisations and Movements in Contexts of Shrinking Civic Space Impact Research (2018-2019)
- The Art, Activism and Cultural Archive Follow-On Project with Chittagong (Bangladesh), Makerere (Uganda), and York (UK) Universities, (2019-2020)

Activists, artists and academics came together

in workshops, exhibits, residencies and trainings to find out how they could use arts-based practices and encounters to **reveal development alternatives, change their own practice and breathe new life into their work.**

This toolkit captures the best of these examples and experiences.

- It looks specifically at **how to use art to help us think, discuss and collaborate in new ways**, make space for critical and new ideas to take form, root our activism in the local context, and expand the definition of activism.
- It is about **how to become a more artful practitioner, by reflecting on your own practice and becoming more aware of the artistic context in which you operate.** It explores the invisible alliances with artists that already exist, and how to create relationships and activities with artists that make space for new conversations, ideas and approaches to take form, which can potentially reframe and motivate your work. In this way, the toolkit aims to open space for activists and human rights defenders, including youth activists, to think and act differently, and amplify the impact of their work.
- It is written **from the perspective of activists and practitioners, and focuses on what can be learnt from artists** to challenge and enrich our ways of thinking, working and being in the world. In the process, the artists, activists and practitioners involved in the project have

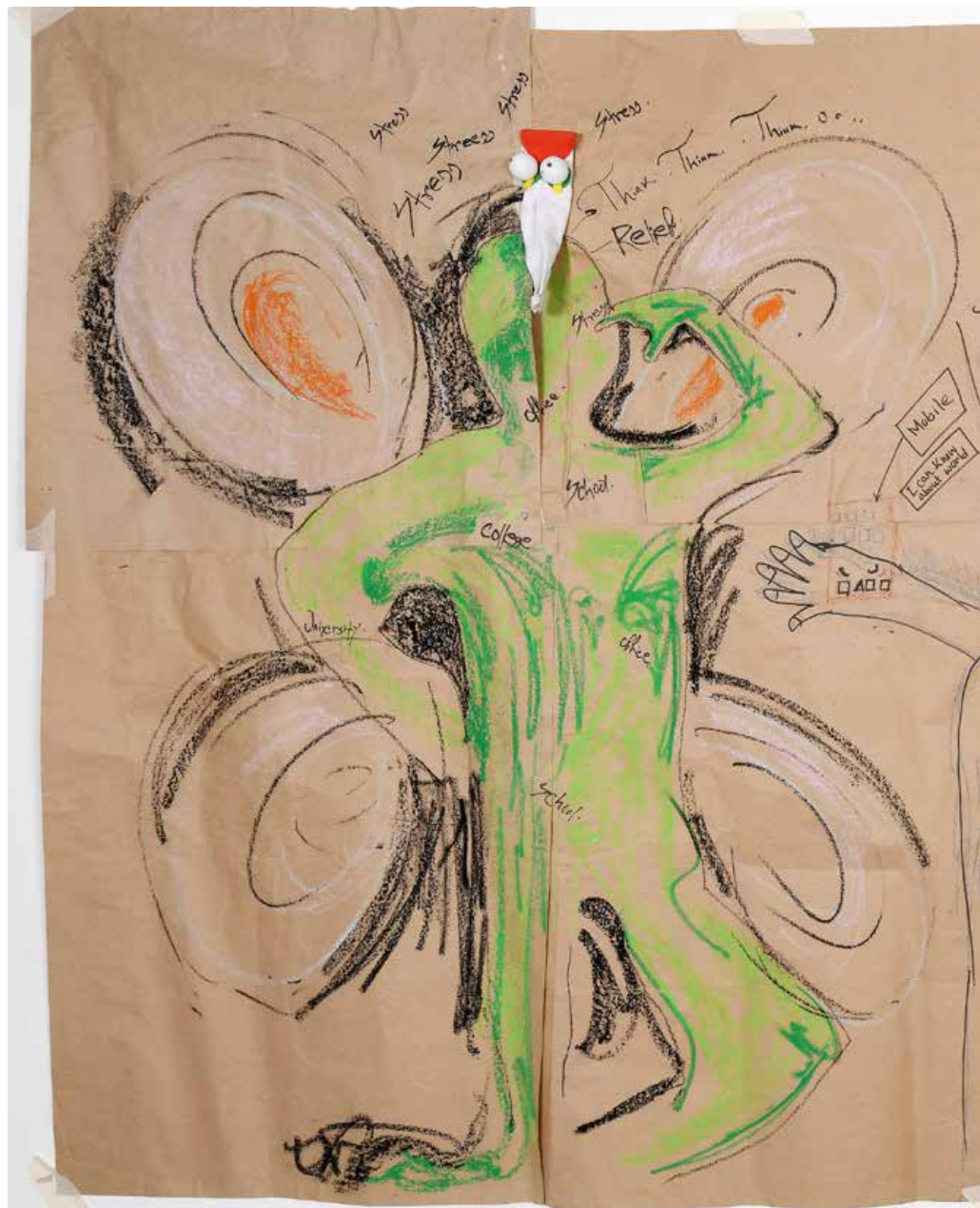
learned a huge amount from each other, as Patience Nitumwesiga reflects above.

The activities in this toolkit are distinct from other types of creative activism, such as campaigns and direct action, as they are designed to **challenge and change the thinking and behaviour of activists themselves**, rather than the actors or institutions targeted by their campaigns. They are designed to unsettle standard ways of understanding development and how we do activism, and to provide a safe space to critique and interrogate these practices, access fresh perspectives, find new allies and use the arts to express these new ideas. Although not the primary focus of this toolkit, some pointers on how creative activism can be used as a tool for communication, direct action and advocacy are included in Section 6.

In this way, the toolkit strongly complements ActionAid's Human Rights Based Approach and its commitment to advance development alternatives generated through an intersectional feminist approach, which seek to invert dominant relations and structures of power.<sup>2</sup>

*"I found that the Creative Art and Activism has successfully created a safe space where artists, academics and activists expressed their emotions and individual moral beliefs, which I think helped them to trigger visions of a different future".*

**DUNIYA KHANDOKER, ACTIONAID BANGLADESH**



'Think, think, think', bodymap,  
by Atiqul Islam, Creative  
Activism Workshop, Institute  
of Fine Arts, Chittagong  
University, Bangladesh, 2018.  
CREDIT: PAUL SHIELDS

# OVERVIEW

## WHO IS THIS TOOLKIT FOR?

The toolkit is for anyone – artist, activist, development practitioner or theorist – who is interested in trying to ‘do’ development differently. This includes youth activists and practitioners seeking alternative, creative strategies and approaches to change. For instance, perhaps you feel that collaboration between NGOs and artists can be very formulaic, and you want to ensure that collaboration is creative and constructive in ways that have the potential to shift power.

- **Maybe you work for an NGO** (non-governmental organisation) and want to bring together artists, academics and other development practitioners to better understand what development alternatives are out there.
- **Maybe you are a group of youth activists** planning a project or research and want to consider different ways of doing the work.
- **Maybe you are an artist** working with NGOs

and you want to learn about some tools or theories that resonate with your practice.

- **Maybe you are an academic** working with artists and activists and want to know more about linking theory and practice.

*“... when we do programme development, programme design, let’s try to get our brains out of the development mindset and create more fictional processes.”*

**ANINDITA ROY, ACTIONAID**

## WHY INTEGRATE ARTS-BASED TOOLS AND PRACTICE?

As activists and practitioners, we can get into habits of thinking in a set way or pursuing pre-set agendas, rather than looking at each situation on its own merits. Sometimes this can be a useful shortcut, but it can mean our thinking gets stuck. The pressure to be productive and efficient can lead us to work hard at things that do not result in change, or that even risk reinforcing injustice.



Eureka Abu Rezwan beside his bodymap at the Creative Activism workshop, Dhaka, 2018.  
CREDIT: ACTIONAID



### Ratna Kapur - Indian feminist

Ratna Kapur points out that the pressures of activism direct practitioners towards *doing* rather than being. The urgency of work that tries to tackle injustice can leave “*little or no pause for reflection.*”

But our work is influenced by the discriminatory and colonial ideas that we have (unconsciously) internalised. If we are so busy in our work that we fail to reflect on and free ourselves from these ideas, we run the risk of prioritising the wrong things or of taking action in ways that reinforce oppression.<sup>3</sup>

### Makau Mutua - Kenyan legal scholar

Makau Mutua argues that human rights NGOs in East Africa should work with academics to reimagine human rights and social justice “*through the prism of the rich African cultural heritage and values in the region.*”

By rooting the way they think about justice more firmly in local contexts, activists might gain confidence to question predetermined priorities and challenge standard blueprints of what human rights work should look like.<sup>5</sup>

Using arts-based methods is not a silver bullet for changing the ways that we work. But giving time and energy to these methods, and actively engaging in open-ended, disruptive activities, can help us shift our thinking, as part of the process of shifting power. This can help us to:

- bring together potential allies from different backgrounds and build more diverse movements;
- unlock a greater range of visions of the future, and of new ways of working;<sup>4</sup>
- make sure that our work reflects a more diverse range of cultural traditions and expressions of justice;
- explore new ways of communicating with and engaging audiences;
- challenge and redefine objectives that are prioritised in activist and NGO work; and
- question and change the way we think, do our work and be in the world.

*“To challenge power needs spaces to freely think and discuss, to get the positive vibration to take a stand and go beyond in your thinking”*

**DUNIYA KHANDOKER, ACTIONAID BANGLADESH**



‘Yes’ bodymap by Abu Rezwana Eureka, Creative Activism Workshop, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2018, CREDIT: PAUL SHIELD



## WHAT'S DIFFERENT ABOUT THIS APPROACH?

*“New networks, skills and platforms can create unique coalitions”*

DUNIYA KHANDOKER, ACTIONAID BANGLADESH

NGOs often ask artists to design communication or campaign materials. The Creative Arts and Activism Project in Uganda and Bangladesh was different, exploring how artists, activists and academics could collaborate in other areas. It aimed to explore whether the arts can be used to disrupt our habits of thinking and of doing our work, to expand civil society space and to imagine and reimagine alternatives.

theory

### Iris Marion Young - US feminist political theorist

Iris Young points to how activists use pictures, songs and other playful forms of expression to disrupt existing ways of thinking and *“make us wonder about what we are doing.”*

This kind of creative activism can expose the roots of structural inequalities and dominant narratives. It can be used to challenge the very terms of political debates or policy-making processes, making room for different kinds of questions to be asked and different kinds of solutions to be considered.<sup>6</sup>

Activists and academics often use creative forms of expression, and many artists consider themselves activists. But too often they work in parallel, without interacting in a meaningful way. The Creative Arts and Activism Project brought people together who would not usually collaborate. Each participant drew on their individual experience, expertise and life outside of work.

- **The artists** helped us to say things that would not normally be said in activist and development conversations.
- **The academics** – and many activists – introduced theory, including feminist theory, and knowledge that extended these conversations into new territory.
- **The activists** drew the conversations back to practical real-world experiences and solutions.

In practice there was a lot of crossover between these roles, but bringing together academics, artists and activists made it possible to have more creative, visionary, experimental conversations and interactions.

### Achille Mbembe - Cameroonian political theorist

Achille Mbembe argues that art has the potential *“to free us from the shackles of development both as an ideology and as a practice.”*

Art can pave a way for a *“practice of the imagination”* and the struggle to *“write our name in history.”*<sup>7</sup>

theory

The artistic activities provided participants with an opportunity to bring *themselves* back into the picture and reflect on their personal motivations and experiences. Activists found it interesting to know how the moral dilemmas and emotional responses they face in their work are also being explored by artists and academics. This helped them to think about these questions in new ways. Many discovered new solidarities, which helped to bring into focus new allies and potential collaborations, and expanded the working boundaries of their activism.

This approach brings together **theory and practice** to help participants flesh out, unpick and contextualise problematic habits and challenging dilemmas. Theories can help participants give

words to dilemmas they are facing, but struggle to articulate or make sense of. It can help them situate their own ideas in the context of what others have said and thought – giving them something they can agree with, disagree with or reimagine. This can be academic theory, or other types such as the theory expressed in poetry or stories, or through the creative practices of feminist networks.

*“We need to engage with the voices that came before and how they saw the world... Somewhere there is this voice saying this is what you should believe. And now we are also coming as individuals and asking: is this what we should believe? ... We are not taking everything just as we received. We are taking it and sieving it and sometimes trying to wrestle with it – to make meaning of it.”*

**SUSAN KIGULI, UGANDAN POET AND LECTURER AT MAKERERE UNIVERSITY**

‘The power of women’ bodymap by ‘Badhon’ (Taslima Akter), Institute of Fine Arts, Chittagong, Bangladesh, 2018. CREDIT: PAUL SHEILDS



## HOW TO USE THE TOOLKIT

This toolkit covers a series of tools used in the Creative Arts and Activism workshops, explaining what each one is, how to use it and why it is useful. The tools are organised into six sections:

- 1. Working with artists:** Tools to involve artists. This models different ways of being, discussing and surfacing new ideas.
- 2. Making art together:** Tools to behave like an artist. These tools help to shift participants' mindsets, to step outside the boundaries of our accepted roles and allow ourselves to act out different ways of doing things.
- 3. Working with theory:** Tools to bring in other perspectives. These tools help us to acknowledge the body of work which has come before us and draw from alternative interpretations of familiar narratives and practices.
- 4. Reading art:** Tools to record and respond to art. These are tools to facilitate working together to critically assess what we have made, seen and heard, and understand the significance from different perspectives.
- 5. Working collaboratively:** Tools for working as a team. These tools help to strengthen alliances across disciplines and roles, to achieve change going forward.
- 6. Extending creative activism:** Tools for expanding your creative activism. These are tools to support participants to identify and tap into what others have done and are doing.

We acknowledge that the creative process is reflexive and circular, and so ordering tools in a certain structure is a false exercise. The order we have created is designed to help the reader dip into different ideas pragmatically, though each tool can be used for a variety of processes. They can be used at any stage of a project or campaign cycle, whether at community meetings and inception workshops, during the design of campaign or advocacy interventions or planning a project structure, or as part of an evaluation.

The tool descriptions are illustrated with examples from the Creative Arts and Activism project, with links to videos for further information. We also highlight some of the theory used to design the work and push the boundaries in our conversations. In the examples and quotes, we have stayed true to the language used by the academics, artists and activists who took part. As a result, there may be words that are familiar to artists or academics but unfamiliar to activists, or insights from theory that might intrigue some readers but feel less easy to understand for others. We tried to express these insights as clearly as possible, using technical terms only where they help link the example or quote to the broader debates that they are part of. If these examples don't speak to you, feel free to pass them by.

### Susan Finley - Canadian education theorist

Susan Finley suggests that the arts can be used to shake up notions of identity, culture and social order, and make it more obvious that these are not fixed, but can be changed. The arts can provide tools to imagine and implement new visions of dignity, care and democracy, and new ways of being in the world.<sup>8</sup>

theory



## SOME NOTES ON FACILITATION

*“If we want to change people’s thinking we need to connect with them. Behaviour is not a material thing, it is an abstract emotional thing, that is the motivation for making change... Development workers are realising that if you want to make change first you need to think about your behaviour, lifestyle morality, values and wellbeing. These tools are good to reflect on your well-being, your roots and how you’re thinking.”*

DUNIYA KHANDOKER, ACTIONAID BANGLADESH

Facilitating these tools successfully requires skill, the ability to build rapport with a group and - as far as possible - transparency about your own position. Facilitators need to think carefully about the session objectives, as well as potential challenges, power dynamics and other factors that may affect the process.

## DESIGNING YOUR WORKSHOP

**Choose your tools appropriately.** The tools need different amounts of time to introduce and work through. Some will work better for some groups than others. Consider which tools and exercises will be most suitable for your context, group and objectives. Consider working with the tools and media that most enthuse you or that you feel most comfortable with, as your enthusiasm and confidence will shine through.

**Try to avoid having a tight agenda.** The idea is to use art to help participants think differently. The tools are designed to be used as prompts rather than end points in themselves. Use them and adapt them in response to the interests of the group you are working with.

## SETTING THE TONE

- **Build a sense of trust and rapport within the group.** Team building exercises can be useful when a group is very diverse, to help people feel more comfortable sharing their thoughts and participating actively. Such exercises can

also help the facilitator get to know the group, the different personalities and potential power dynamics that may need to be sensitively managed.

- **Ensure that participants are respectful and conscious of giving space for everyone to speak and think openly.** Some participants might speak over or on behalf of other participants in ways that are not always helpful. It might take some participants a bit of time to work through their ideas and express them in a way that they are happy with. Leave lots of room for silence and respect those who choose not to contribute.
- **Explain concepts clearly and in ways that are relevant to the group and context.** Some of the tools are quite complex and may include language and terms that are not commonly known or understood. Allow time for questions and check for misunderstandings as you go. Be prepared to acknowledge and accept limitations in understanding in ways that do not leave participants feeling undermined or demotivated.

## FACILITATING THE CONVERSATION

### Michel Foucault - French social theorist

*“Power is the concrete power that any individual can hold, and which he can surrender, either as a whole or in part, so as to constitute a power or a political sovereignty”.<sup>9</sup>*

Theory

- **Avoid controlling the discussion or activities.** You are not looking for outputs, you are aiming to create space for different kinds of conversations and make time to reimagine. This approach is not about consensus-building and achieving a joint answer, but allowing different perspectives to emerge and sit alongside each other. Sometimes this feels uncomfortably fluid and flexible, but it can make room for the things we don’t usually talk about to surface.

- **Pay attention to power dynamics in the group.** Activist and artist spaces can involve just as many unequal power relationships as any other space. Gender, class, race, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, nationality, professional background, reputation and personality can all affect the ways in which people participate and engage in the space and interact with others. For more ideas on how to think about power and facilitation see actionaid's feminist leadership principles <https://actionaid.Org/feminist-leadership>
- **Be prepared for emotional responses.** Many of these tools are designed to open space for expressing, challenging and analysing personal beliefs and connecting emotionally with others. The facilitator should be prepared for strong emotional responses and consider the skills needed to ensure a supportive environment, whilst recognising that this emotional engagement is also part of how the toolkit works.
- **But do not shut down or avoid (respectful) disagreements or emotionally-charged discussions.** The aim of creative methodologies is to disrupt habitual patterns of interaction. So long as these are not personal attacks and are focused on the issues at hand, they can be important processes for challenging thinking. Some

participants might find this uncomfortable – you can make it clear that any participant can leave the room at any time.

- **Leave it open-ended.** It can be helpful to leave threads hanging, rather than pulling everything together into a set of take-away messages. Invite participants to think through possible resolutions for themselves, allowing the experience to ignite new thoughts that might help them to reimagine human rights and development. If possible, leave the task of thinking through the implications for their work until a few days, weeks or even months after the initial session – perhaps giving participants a creative task to do in the meantime to allow them to continue to reflect on the experience in more creative, open-ended ways.

**Jenny Kitzinger - UK feminist researcher**

*"Tapping into such variety of communication is important because people's knowledge and attitudes are not entirely encapsulated in reasoned responses to direct questions."<sup>10</sup>*

theory

## A WORK IN PROGRESS

This is still a work in progress: we would love to get feedback on how you are using the toolkit and how the tools we describe – or other arts-based tools that you are using – work in practice. We are particularly interested in hearing examples of where arts-based tools have been used to:

- bring people together in solidarity to facilitate change across local, national and global levels;
- open space to imagine and reimagine ways of thinking, working and being that have led to project, programme or organisational change, including shifts in strategic priorities;
- ensure decision-makers and the public pay more attention to activists' issues; or
- enhance and disrupt civil society space where this space is shrinking.

# SECTION 1

# WORKING WITH

# ARTISTS: TOOLS TO

# INVOLVE ARTISTS



'Model artist' by Shohrab Jahan at  
Institute of Fine Arts, Chittagong,  
Bangladesh, 2018.  
CREDIT: PAUL SHIELDS/ EMILIE FLOWER



# Model different ways of being, discuss and surface new ideas, involving artists from the very beginning of a project to help frame the work differently

*‘The burden on civil society to make change is huge, knowing artists are doing parallel work releases some pressure, finding out ‘Who else is speaking?’, and asking ‘How many more people are out there that are also working on these same thoughts?’ reduces the loneliness of activism.’*

JENNIPHER ACHALOI, ACTIONAID UGANDA

Involving artists from the beginning of a project can support ongoing collaboration, create space for different approaches to influence project design, and foster the conditions for building alternative ways of thinking, doing and being together. Participants in the Creative Arts and Activism workshops in Uganda and Bangladesh found a sense of solidarity very important - the realisation that there were other people doing similar work in different ways.

## WHY IS IT USEFUL?

Many artists practice **ways of working that provoke reflection**. They think a lot about the pieces they make - the materials they use, where the ideas are coming from, how the piece might be understood by different audiences, and how this connects to their broader body of work. They bring the personal into their work to make something meaningful, and be ‘present’. For many artists, their lifestyle and working processes become an embodiment of their politics. The activists in the Creative Arts and Activism project found this blurring of the professional and personal, and artists’ more reflective expression of lived politics, refreshing and inspiring.

Many artists intentionally transgress societal boundaries and disrupt standard framings. The work that activists do is also challenging and disruptive, but tends to be more instrumental. Artists can be disruptive in more open ways. It is this power to push boundaries, reframe discussions and engage with audiences that can be evoked when using the arts to expand conversations.<sup>11</sup>

*“Showing what artists are really doing and their slower way of working brings different elements – personal ones, greater depth, more analytical.”*

DUNIYA KHANDOKER, ACTIONAID BANGLADESH

### Michel Foucault - French social theorist

*“We must uncover our rituals for what they are: completely arbitrary things, tied to our bourgeois way of life ... transcend them in the manner of play, by means of games and irony; it is good to be dirty and bearded, to have long hair; to look like a girl when one is a boy (and vice versa); one must put ‘in play,’ show up, transform and reverse the systems which quietly order us about.”<sup>12</sup>*

theory



Yuvraj Zahed A. Chowdhury performance at Cheragi Art Show 7, Chittagong 2019. CREDIT: EMILIE FLOWER  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pSEIVVknUx8&list=PLbMLV63wP5YMgiWKQmjJNgGDxas7i3J\\_1&index=20](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pSEIVVknUx8&list=PLbMLV63wP5YMgiWKQmjJNgGDxas7i3J_1&index=20)

## USE AN ARTS SPACE

When holding a meeting or reflection, consider using a space associated with the arts. This can encourage participants from other sectors to step out of their comfort zones and into a new, potentially unfamiliar kind of physical space where they are invited to think and reflect differently.



Creative activism workshop space at the Makerere University Art Gallery, Kampala, 2017-2019. CREDIT: EMILIE FLOWER

### D. Soyini Madisor - African-American performance theorist

Madison argues that the environment in which an encounter happens, which includes “*engaged, meaningful bodies and a scenic space,*” influences the way the encounter unfolds.

Think about the “*textures, smells, sounds, tastes and sights*” that participants can sense and how these might influence the ways they engage and interact.<sup>13</sup>

theory

## FACILITATE WITH AN ARTIST

When bringing people together - whether for strategy building, programme or research planning, or looking at campaign actions - consider asking an artist to facilitate or co-facilitate your sessions (see facilitation notes above). Working with artists who are keen to explore ideas together – not just to teach participants techniques – can change the dynamics of conversations that have become stuck in all too familiar ruts, and create a more reflective space.

In the Creative Arts and Activism project we worked with writers, film-makers, painters, collage-makers, sculptors, installation-artists, actors and theatre directors, conceptual and performance artists and others. Some did more commercially-oriented work – as graphic designers, teachers, development consultants, journalists and more. Some considered themselves activists. Some wanted to avoid direct political messaging, preferring to explore their ideas in more playful, open ways. All were part of a local community of artists and pursued artistic practice that was not about working to commission but about creating a personal body of work.

You might already have links to artists, or you could ask around for recommendations and introductions, or perhaps identify artists with interesting work and get in touch directly. Consider inviting artists working in a range of different mediums, from different artistic circles, and of different genders and cultural or socioeconomic backgrounds.

## MODELS FOR WORKING WITH ARTISTS

*“Hybrid artists [who do graphic design too] will give you a quick result, ‘pure’ artists [who do more conceptual work] think a lot.”*

JENNIPHER ACHALOI, ACTIONAID UGANDA

- **Think about how to engage artists in an open way that does not result in their work being reduced to a communications tool.** If you just want a piece of art to communicate your work and have a fixed idea of what you want, then you can ask a graphic designer to support you. If you want arts to help participants think differently, it’s important to involve artists in a way which is not instrumental.
- **Think about why you initiated the collaboration. What are you trying to achieve? What could it look like?** If you are looking for genuine collaboration with horizontal power relations between all partners, then you have to be prepared for unexpected outputs.
- **Think about how you will support artists**

**involved in your collaborative and creative processes to access financial support for their work.** It is important to be aware that the ways of working and living of some artists can make it hard for them to engage with more structured approaches to project management.

*– In the Creative Arts and Activism project, a conversation about creative activism in Tanzania led to people talking about the challenges of working with more conceptual, less commercially-oriented artists, particularly with complicated and time-consuming financial accounting and reporting procedures. Participants described how directive and micro-managed funding models could destroy organic artistic movements or oversteer creative ideas.*

## Funding models for working with artists

As well as involving artists as workshop facilitators, there are many innovative models for working with artists that try to balance the need for accountability with the need for creative freedom.

- **Open grants:** in the Creative Arts and Activism project we gave honorariums for artists to develop an artistic response to the work we had done together, but didn’t specify what that response should look like. See [www.creativealternatives.net](http://www.creativealternatives.net) for examples.
- **Open calls:** The Arctivism project put out an open call for artistic responses to a specific issue, in this case for artist-activist collaborations in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. See <https://www.hrdhub.org/arctivism> for examples.
- **Ongoing relationships:** Another model is to develop an ongoing relationship with a particular artist and/or arts institution. See <http://resonar.net/projects> for examples.



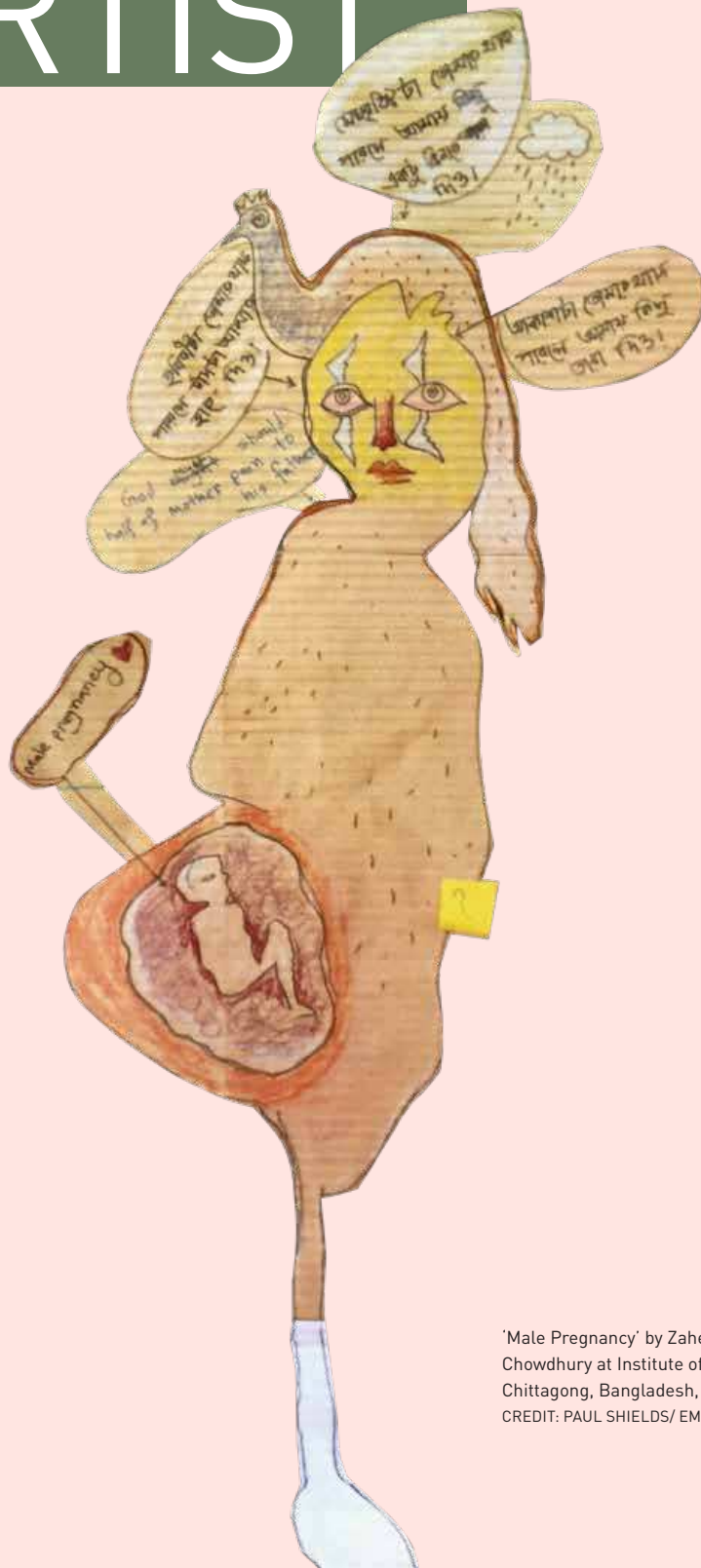
# SECTION 2

# MAKING ART

# TOGETHER: TOOLS

# TO BEHAVE LIKE

# AN ARTIST



'Male Pregnancy' by Zahed Ali  
Chowdhury at Institute of Fine Arts,  
Chittagong, Bangladesh, 2018.  
CREDIT: PAUL SHIELDS/ EMILIE FLOWER

Do some art, rather than just talking about creativity. **Step outside the boundaries of our accepted roles** and allow ourselves to play out different ways of doing things.

### WHY IS IT USEFUL?

Making art helps us to escape from the usual narratives, references, stereotypes and 'epistemologies' (or ways of knowing) that we live within. Through the process of making, we tap into the rich artistic heritage of the places we come from and local cultural expressions of dignity, resistance, claim-making and utopias. This can help to **shed new light on old problems**.

While making art isn't a panacea for all development dilemmas, the hope is that this joint experience of making together will enable a group to say things in new ways and **open out new territory** for their activism.

theory

#### Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas - The Seriousness of Play

For Canadian artist Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas of the Indigenous Haida people, "Artwork is a personal adventure for the people who create it and for those who choose to participate in the experience. I create work that mostly avoids the idea of dominance and resist the idea that the artist is an ultimate authority...I like to create work that confounds the observer and requires them to decide where the dominant horizon of the work is."

Academic Nicola Levell describes how Yahgulanaas' playful approach disrupts social norms, "As a form of social interaction, play consistently intervenes and disrupts the expected, institutionalised and controlled behaviours of everyday life. It opens a space of creativity in which new possibilities and different ways of thinking and acting can unfold."<sup>14</sup>

See Art is Not a Noun, It's a Verb: Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas on "Carpe Fin", on his Haida Manga, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tn9a0mKqAW8>

#### Mihaela Mihai - UK-based philosopher

Mihaela Mihai recognises that our capacity for reflection is limited by our everyday habits – the ways we talk and interact, our "posture, gestures, dress, accent, bearing, manners" – which are often unconscious.

But she argues that these habits can be disrupted by developing relationships with people who are not like us, learning to welcome difference, and by engaging with powerful art and stories.<sup>15</sup>

theory

# PERFORMANCE AND THEATRE GAMES

Making theatre is an active way of becoming aware of performance and encouraging a group to 'play'.

*In the Creative Arts and Activism project, we used several theatre exercises to loosen up our bodies and minds, and to think about performance and symbolism, from still-life exercises to group tableaux and short performances. The exercises encouraged participants to step outside their usual roles and imagine themselves in different realities, including:*

- **Theatre of the Oppressed:** Several of the exercises drew from Augusto Boal's 'theatre of the oppressed' methodology. This approach presents participants with opportunities to shift from passive spectator to active participant in "rehearsals for revolution", by intervening in scenes to suggest alternative responses to dilemmas.<sup>16</sup>
- **Upside-down worlds:** We drew actively from 'upside down worlds', utopias and alter egos. This involved bringing in characters like the trickster/ cheat to perform the role of disruptive innovator, and sow the seeds of a new system in protected spaces.<sup>17</sup> In their final stages, these theatrical exercises evolved into nonsense, dreamscapes and fantasy.

- **Tableaux:** This involves making a still image using people's bodies, used in stylised, melodramatic theatre and dance as a moment of recognition, to signal the discovery of an important idea or to mark an emotional moment.

## WHY IS IT USEFUL?

Exercises that mimic recognisable ways of working with our bodies can be useful for helping a group work together easily, breaking down physical differences, breaking up long conversations, and allowing the group to think with their bodies.

- In Bangladesh the still life of a thinking man under the boughs of a tree (made from the arms of two other participants) was the main prompt for their collaborative scenario the next day.

Theatrical exercises create formal (on-stage) and informal (off-stage) moments, where people hold different types of conversations. Producing our own theatrical moments can open up new awareness by focusing our attention on the power and symbolism of image. Theatre is a good way of encouraging a group to move through different ways of thinking and being, and noticing their own performances, which can lead to discussions of how 'development' is performed by different actors and the impact of these performances.





## Tableau (Still image)

Making a tableau is a useful introductory exercise. A tableau is a staged still image made using people's bodies. A form of tableau is used by studio photographers and artists to illustrate ideals for advertising billboards and portraits. A 'tableau vivant' involves dressing up and posing as figures in famous scenes or works of art, a form of artmaking that has found its contemporary home on Instagram in a global resurgence during the Covid-19 pandemic, for example at #betweenartandquarentine.<sup>18</sup>

**Time:** 15 – 30 min

**Preparation:** Ensure you have an empty area to walk around and work in.

### Process:

- Start by asking the group to walk around pointing at objects and registering what they are.
- After a minute, ask them to name the previous object while pointing at a new object. Give them an example to illustrate what you mean.
- After another minute of this ask them to stop.
- Whilst still pointing at the object, ask them to make up a headline (in their heads) for a story about this object, using the words, "This is the [insert object] that [insert end of sentence]..." e.g. "This is the ball that was used for the winning goal for this year's world cup".
- Go around the participants asking them to call out their sentences.
- Ask if anyone will volunteer their sentence as the headline for a tableau.
- Gather around the volunteer and explain that you are going to create a freeze frame from the story.
- Encourage participants to volunteer to be different characters in the tableau.
- The result is a group of motionless figures representing a scene, a tableau vivant.

The exercise can be a good way to open up conversations about how we choose to represent ourselves, or act simply as a warm-up for further theatre exercises.



Group tableau, Creative Activism workshop in Kampala, Uganda, 2017.  
CREDIT: EMILIE FLOWER

### Pothikrit: Youth and forum theatre

'Pothikrit' is a youth-led theatre group in Bangladesh that, "dream[s] of a society rich in human values and a green and peaceful world". Using theatre, they seek to engage and empower young people on issues of climate change, sustainable development, social cohesion and justice and dignity for all.

Pothikrit uses a method called forum theatre. Young people come together to watch a play put on by Pothikrit and decide whose perspective they want to explore, considering where they might have done things differently. Actors replay a scene, with the spectators stopping the performance where they like and stepping in opposite the relevant actor to explore alternative solutions and play out how they think the story should have gone. The group make use of familiar references from traditional songs, dances, stories and theatrical forms to engage the audience.

See also: *GOMVIRA* – a traditional folk song development organization from Bangladesh that also uses stand-up comedy and flash mobs to promote social awareness: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9DwKzK5j14>

# TOOL 2

## Image Theatre

This tool was introduced and facilitated by Dr Jane Plastow, Professor of African Theatre at Leeds University, at the first Creative Activism Network Workshop held under the Creative Activism: Art and Development Alternatives Network Project.

**Time:** 30 min - 2hrs

**Preparation:** Ensure you have an empty area to work in and to present work to each other.

### Process:

- Create teams of 3-5 and ask one member of each group to silently move the other participants' bodies into a still scene that represents different emotions. **It's important that the participants confirm they are happy for this to happen and have the option not to take part.**
- Within each group, each person takes turns to move the others into positions.
- Ask each group to present their tableaux to the others.
- Open and encourage a discussion about their meaning.
  - *The method can be adapted for different contexts. For example, in Bangladesh, teams were asked to produce representations of imagined utopias. By adding a few props, the exercises were transformed into a familiar but theatrical form of organised play.*<sup>19</sup>





# DRAWING

We used a number of different drawing exercises in our workshops, some were designed to provide an **alternative means of expressing ourselves**, some to **design alternative futures**. This included:

- In pairs, drawing quick five-minute **portraits** of each other to introduce ourselves;
- Sketching a timeline of our national cultural **heroes**;
- Drawing pictures of our **visions for the future**;
- Tracking conversations with doodle drawings, making use of graphic artists in our mix,
- Sending imaginary postcards to ourselves from the future.
- **Mapping our bodies**, a particularly versatile exercise where participants trace around their bodies and fill in the outline with words or images.

## WHY IS IT USEFUL?

Drawing gives a chance for people to gather their thoughts, think more slowly and independently after intense sessions, and express their ideas through an alternative medium. Drawing exercises are especially useful for revealing the way in which images strengthen scripts, stories and ideal types through participants' use of repeating and overlapping images.

- In the Creative Arts and Activism workshops, the familiar repeating motifs people drew to represent the future demonstrated the standard framings and limitations we hold, the futures we imagine and prompted us to seek out more contemporary alternative imaginations.
- These image-based exercises were particularly useful in Bangladesh where there is a very strong visual culture.



Conversation doodle by Kazi Istel at the creative activism workshop, Dhaka, 2017.  
CREDIT: PAUL SHIELDS

# TOOL 3

## Body maps

The body mapping exercise can help participants to see a different side to each other and allow the group to fall into creative flow. Doing this at the beginning of a workshop means that participants make a mark on the space, quickly transforming it into something which also represents the group identity.

*"I think the part about sketching each other's body outline was very different. I had not done it before. It made us learn about each other much faster and yet in a respectful, intimate manner."*

**PATIENCE NITUMWESIGA, UGANDAN FILM-MAKER**

**Time:** 30 min - 2hrs

**Preparation:** You will need plain surface areas or floorspace large enough to draw around half of the groups bodies at one time. Use plain walls or floor that can be drawn on, or cleaned afterwards, or tape large sheets of paper or cloth to the surfaces before the workshop begins. Provide chalks, pastels or pens for a simple exercise, and any other arts materials you would like to use to extend the exercise e.g. paint, cloth, magazines, glue and scissors.

### Process:

- Invite participants to work in pairs or larger groups, and to draw around each other directly onto the wall or paper.
- Provide prompts to help people populate their images with words or images about themselves. One approach is to represent our roots (in our feet and legs), our emotions (in our bellies), our skills (in our hands) and our ideas (in our heads).
- Participants then decorate their 'person' as imaginatively as they like.
- You can find a fuller explanation of the body mapping technique as used in ActionAid's Women's Rights Human Rights Based Approach, here: [https://www.reflectionaction.org/tools\\_and\\_methods/22/?from=ov](https://www.reflectionaction.org/tools_and_methods/22/?from=ov)
  - *An alternative we tried in Bangladesh was to body map ourselves as our alter ego, adding more layers to the body maps throughout the workshop. We later presented an exhibition of the body maps from Bangladesh at York University. Ribon Khandokhar, a professor of performing arts at Jahangirnagar University, used this method with her students to explore characterisation in theatre.*





# TOOL 4

## Postcards from the future

Drawing and writing postcards is a very quiet exercise that gives people room to think and reflect as individuals. Our group remarked on the similarities between the messages on the postcards, dominated by environmental concerns and rural idylls.

**Time:** 15min – 1hr

**Preparation:** Make sure everyone has somewhere to rest their paper for drawing. Give participants at least 15 minutes to make their postcard. Provide a pen for each person, and coloured pens or paint for more detailed postcards.

**Process:**

- Give each person a piece of paper and ask them to write themselves a postcard from the future.
- This can be linked to the workshop theme, or relate more directly to themes that participants are dealing with in their activism, or it might be used in a more open way, to surface the overlap between the personal and political, for example.
- Participants show each other their postcards as a group and reflect on the futures they imagined that they were writing from.



Participant reflecting during the postcards from the future exercise at the Creative Activism Workshop in Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2017. CREDIT: RUTH KELLY/ EMILIE FLOWER

## Heroes of a Nation

This type of exercise can show where a group's experiences overlap through their shared knowledge of culturally endorsed histories, as well as surfacing interesting but often equally predictable disagreements.

The exercises can be used to raise awareness and discussion about dominant national/ group historical narratives, the implications of using this particular cast of characters to symbolise a nation, alternative narratives and gaps in these symbolic histories. For example, one team remarked that they had produced an almost exact replica of the heroes displayed in the national museum.

**Time:** 1hr

**Preparation:** 15-25 plain pieces of paper, A5 to A4 sized, and a pen.

**Process:**

- Give the group a number of blank sheets of paper.
- Ask them to talk as a group about their national heroes.
- As the conversation develops, participants sketch their heroes on separate pieces of paper and arrange them in chronological order on the wall.
- Reflect on the kinds of characters that you have come up with as a group, what they stand for and where your knowledge about these characters comes from, as well as the characteristics this standard cast of characters might endorse and exclude.



Images from the Heroes of a Nation exercise, Creative Activism Workshop, Dhaka, 2017.  
CREDIT: EMILIE FLOWER

**Project Archive: Design in Context**

Conceptual sculptor Shohrab Jahan made use of writing and drawing in his workshop with students at the Makerere University School of Fine Art, to draw attention to the spaces we work within.

He started by asking the students to write a description of the physical space they were in just before they arrived at the workshop. He introduced some of his own conceptual work and ideas, and then asked the students to draw an idea for a piece that would represent the space they had described. Shohrab then asked each student to describe the piece to the group and asked them questions about how the object would be displayed. That helped to distil their idea, thinking about scale, position, shape and accompanying objects. This was the foundation for a conversation about design, context and 'thinking outside the box' - while in the box.



# COLLAGE

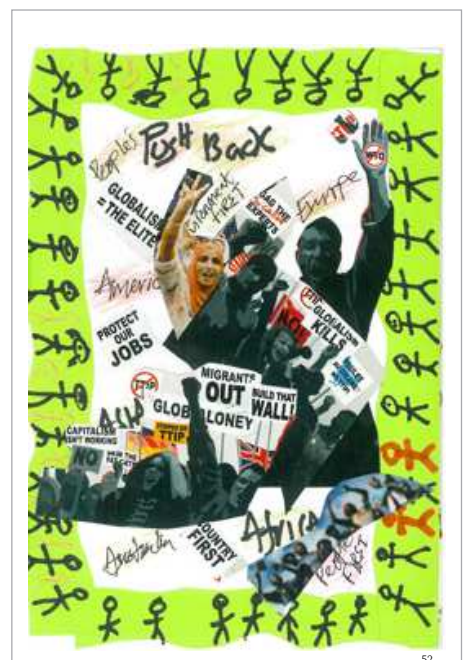
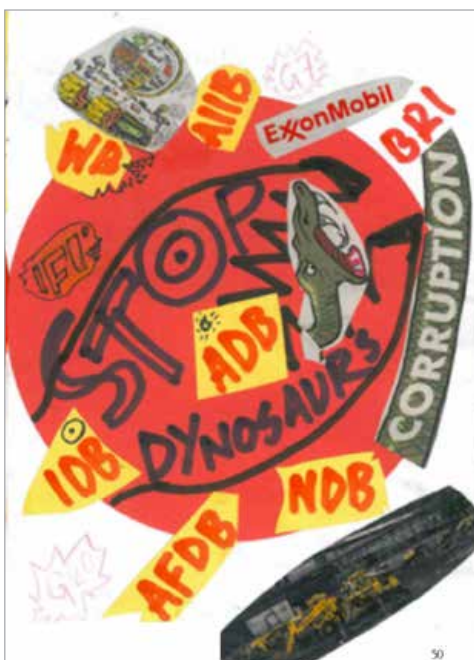
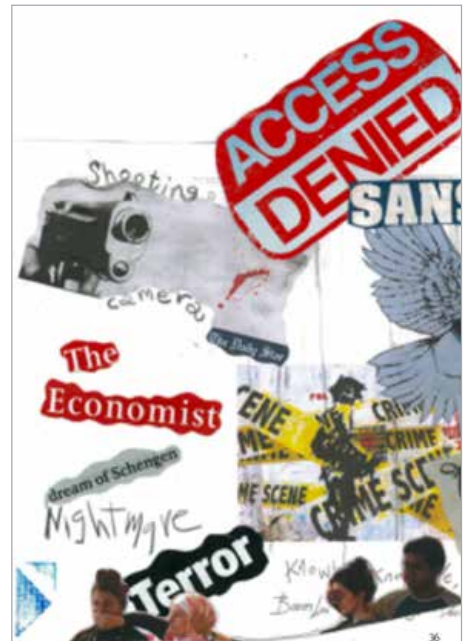
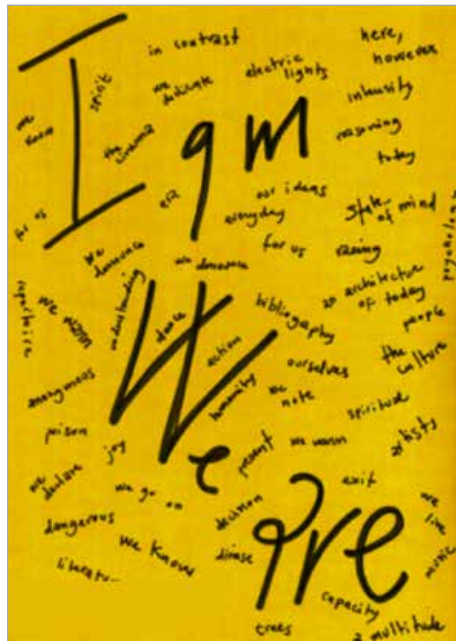
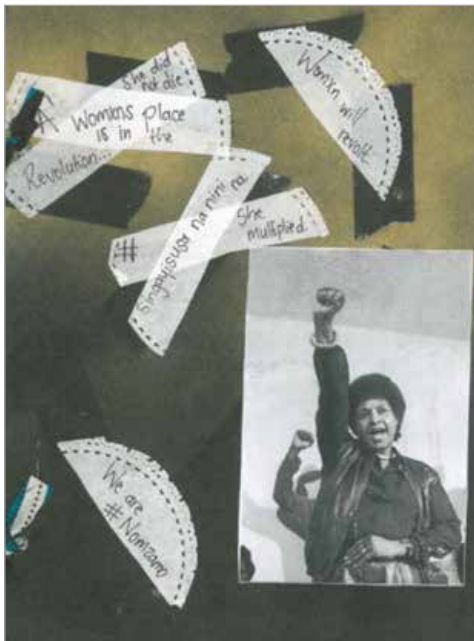
Collage is a technique for creating art from an 'assemblage' of different forms and found objects, and is a useful way to bring together a group's different artistic references. An example of this is a zine. A zine is a self-published, 'home-made' magazine that represents a particular community, put together using collage and scrapbooking. As an art form, the zine has its own radical history and international distribution networks, associated with subcultures such as sci-fi, punk, feminism and anti-colonial movements, and trading on an anti-establishment 'do-it-yourself' philosophy.

Notable examples are the early publications from the Fluxus and Situationist arts movements, the 1960's East African student magazine 'Transition', and the third wave feminist publication, 'Riot grrl'.

## WHY IS IT USEFUL?

Making a collage allows a group to work alongside each other in a different way, express their thoughts through a different medium, and may allow things to be said or expressed that would be self-censored, hard to express or pushed out in a different kind of conversation.

Example pages from a Zine created at the Pushing Back civic space workshop in Arusha, Tanzania, 2019.  
CREDIT: EMILIE FLOWER



# TOOL 6

## Making a zine

The zine is a traditional form used by activists, and a good gateway to creative activism. The form is easy for anyone to do and allows a group to bring their thoughts together, without losing their individual ideas or requiring consensus. The exercise can be scaled up or down to suit any size of group. The boundaries and brevity of the exercise – the number of pages and the time allowed – pushes participants to focus their response.

**Time:** 2hrs - 2 days

**Preparation:** Before the workshop, let people know that you will be making a zine together in response to the workshop themes and encourage them to bring materials that might be useful. You may also want to send them some links to zine projects online before the workshop.

Prepare the materials; paper, glue, magazines and scissors.

### Process:

- Show the group some examples of zines in case the form is unfamiliar to them.
- Agree the theme with the group and allocate 1 or 2 pages to each person.
  - *In Tanzania the activists suggested an open response to the previous day's discussions and were given two pages each.*
- Using a collaging technique, the group sits together while they cut, stick, stitch, and/or illustrate their individual page or pages.
- Participants share their work at the end of the exercise
- Assign someone to take a photo of each piece or scan it onto a computer, to collate the work.
  - *In Tanzania this exercise was led by Pamela Enyonu, a multimedia artist, who collated the zine for the team.*

See an example of the Tanzania zine at <https://www.developmentalternatives.net/zines> or go to <https://theculturetrip.com/africa/south-africa/articles/cape-towns-freshest-zines-to-pay-attention-to/> for more Zine inspiration from South Africa, and [https://issuu.com/clairেসosienkismith/docs/how\\_to\\_make\\_a\\_zine](https://issuu.com/clairেসosienkismith/docs/how_to_make_a_zine) for a short description of how to make a zine.

Making a zine at the Pushing Back workshop, Arusha, Tanzania, 2018.  
CREDIT: EMILIE FLOWER





## SYMBOLIC OBJECTS

Presenting objects can be a good tool for leading into the group zine, by helping the group to shift into a creative way of thinking and presenting their ideas, while highlighting the creativity in the group. This exercise provides an open platform for the group to present something that they have noticed or picked out from their own context and frame this in the art form of their choice, introducing new ideas and mediums to the group.

### WHY IS IT USEFUL?

This exercise can be a chance to talk about the use and influence of symbolic objects, imagery, stories, myths, histories, heroes etc in particular contexts to sustain, frame or to constrain activism. The exercise energises participants by bringing their personal interests, politics and everyday context into the shared space. It almost invariably draws out a side to each participant that might have otherwise remained hidden.

## Presenting symbolic objects

**Time:** 45min to 1.5 hrs, depending on the size of the group

### Preparation:

Before the workshop, ask participants to bring and share a story, picture, poem, song, cutting, photo or any other object that expresses some aspect of their work or context. You can vary the focus to reflect your workshop or meetings focus.

- *For the Creative Alternatives workshops, we asked participants to bring a subversive or inspiring object/ story/song or poem to share.*
- *For the Pushing Back workshop, we asked people to bring examples of the politics they see or hear expressed in the art of their nation.*

### Process:

- Ask participants to sit in a circle and take turns to present their 'objects' in whatever form they have chosen to the group.
- Ask if they could explain briefly why they chose this symbolic object.
- Allow 5 minutes each to keep the exercise moving.
- This exercise is a good starting point for an open conversation about the participants' experiences of creativity in their working/ local/ country context, in relation to the workshop theme.

Sculptor Shohrab Jahan, community activist Kazi Alauddin Ali, labour activist Luna Noor and theatre director and professor Ribon Khandokar listen to another participant at the Creative Activism workshop describing their symbolic object, Dhaka, 2017.

CREDIT: ACTIONAID



## COLLABORATIVE SCENARIOS

A scenario is one of several possible situations that could exist in the future. In a workshop it can be used to describe the collaborative creation of an artwork such as a performance, installation, film or song. This exercise builds on other exercises used for the group to think about possible futures, such as visioning (see page X), body mapping and tableau (see page X and X).

### WHY IS IT USEFUL?

Imagination is not just something we have; it's something we generate together, through shared

experiences, languages, stories, ideas, art, and theory. Drawing from the use of different art forms created during the workshop, participants can incorporate their bodies, personal stories, histories and creative skills in ways that might look like carnival or ritual rather than strategy building – but still relate to the production of ideas about the future. Like collage and montage, rearranging the familiar into unfamiliar combinations can generate new ideas.

Making collaborative scenarios can enable tricky discussions about power and priorities to be worked through within a context where individuals are removed from their own identities in the discussion. Scenarios can be used as a planning tool for activists, to ensure activists are ready to react whatever happens in an ever-changing world.

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## *Improvised scenario*

This exercise can range from a simple improvisation to a fully devised piece and focus of a whole workshop. Producing scenarios can range from a light-hearted and playful exercise to the production of a full-scale performance.

**Time:** 1-3 days.

### **Preparation:**

Before the workshop, and ideally as a group, decide on the art medium you would like to use e.g. devising a theatre show, writing a poem/s, a mural, composing a song, building a sculpture, producing a film. This is likely to be predetermined by the specialism of the artists you have involved or been influenced by the workshop so far. Balance the strengths and interests in the group, within the limitations of time and materials.

- Decide how long you would like to allow for the process; an improvised scene or group story could take a few hours, while a fully realised film, play, radio show or musical event will take a few days.
- Give the group warning. They may want to go away and think about this overnight so that they come in the next day having thought about their contribution, or with more ideas to share.

### **Process:**

- Provide the group with a prompt exercise to help them start to mould ideas about the content and structure of the scenario. This could range from a free flowing conversation to the production of a storyboard, script or song. One approach would be to adapt existing fictional scenarios/scripts to take into account the workshop themes.
- It is likely that this process will be dominated by a few natural directors in the group, so you may want to divide participants into a few smaller groups to allow more variation to emerge.
- Perform and reflect on the piece you have made.

- Compare the effect of doing individual and collaborative pieces. People usually present much more conformist ideas when they work collaboratively in an effort to find common ground. This could make for an interesting conversation about collaborative work and feminist leadership, and allow people's distinctive creative capacity to thrive within teams.
  - In our Uganda workshop participants chose to produce poems that were filmed in different locations and played back. The final poem was an improvised poetic collage by Helena Okiring that involved the whole group, about diaspora, translation and the personal impact of politics. 'Should I stay, or should I go,' can be viewed at <https://youtu.be/vYAMS7JIGBQ>.
  - In Bangladesh the group enacted a theatrical group scenario, depicting a utopian future where human/animal cyborgs are reborn as flowers, and nature overcomes the pressures of technological development.



Helena Okiring and Scovia Arinaitwe compose an improvised poem at the Creative Activism workshop, Kampala, 2017.

## theory

### Taking time out to play

In workshops with participants from different feminist movements in Colombia, Sara Motta and Norma Bermúdez used ritual and dance, as well as mapping and cycles of reflection and action, to help participants explore their relationship with time. When the activities were interrupted by their children playing, participants joined in with their children. This interruption drew their attention to the ways that play and laughter, the unplanned and the disorganised might help us to understand the world in new ways.

Such practices and interruptions can challenge expectations of time, capability and productivity that order our lives. They help activists let go of goal-oriented mentalities and explore other ways of thinking about time.<sup>21</sup>

## ActionAid Future Scenarios Strategy Building

ActionAid used scenarios to develop its 2012-2017 Strategy, following a methodology that drew on similar theories to this toolkit.

The strategy-building process was held over different venues in Johannesburg; the Origins Centre, Constitution Hill, Soccer City, and the Apartheid Museum. Taking participants outside the confines of their hotel and surrounding them with the artefacts and cultural history of South Africa allowed a shifting perspective as they explored new ways of imagining ActionAid.

Future scenarios (set in 2030) were mapped as “knotty issues” about the future of the organisation (in 2011 and then again in 2016). The group came up with more than 20 key issues. For each they defined three different possible positions (roughly, ‘regressive’, ‘status quo’ and ‘progressive’) and then jumbled these all up and mixed them around to develop briefs for people to write three creative scenarios.

Although each one was full of contradictions, they were used as a “codification” that could be shared as a song, play, show, article or text. After watching the 15 minute performances of each scenario and reading the text, the participants discussed what they liked and disliked. They used their notes from these discussions to define where the consensus was across 120 people, before writing a fourth scenario, the first and only REAL scenario which presented a radical version of the consensus.<sup>22</sup>



Helena Okiring reflects on her experience at the Creative Alternatives workshop, Kampala, Uganda 2017. CREDIT: STILL FROM FOOTAGE TAKEN BY EMILIE FLOWER



Ribon Khandokar in discussion at the creative alternatives workshop, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2017. CREDIT: EMILIE FLOWER



## VISIONING

Visioning is a relaxing exercise that asks people to sit or lie on the floor and picture a different future or dreamscape. It can take many forms and operate at any scale. Many organisations use visioning as a springboard for building group scenarios that imagine the changes they want to see.

### WHY IS IT USEFUL?

This exercise is a switch-off from group activities and allows participants' minds to wander with direction, into different modes of thinking and imagining. It was especially popular with the busy activists in Uganda, who rarely have time in their lives to lie back and think or dream. Reflecting together afterwards builds solidarity within the group.

### Visioning exercise

**Time:** 30 min

**Preparation:**

Find a comfortable space where participants can lie down or sit comfortably with their eyes closed. Check with the group where and how they would feel more comfortable, for example a quiet area in the workshop space or outside with room to sit or lie down. You may need to provide mats, cloths or seats for some of the group.

**Process:**

- Ask the group to close their eyes (if they are comfortable to do so) and imagine themselves in the future and their place in it.
- Support participants to identify how they would reach their vision. For example, you could ask participants to imagine a full day in the distant future, from waking to falling asleep, asking where they are, what they sense – feel, move, see, taste, hear – where they go, what they do and who or what they meet along the way. Another method, often used in meditation and yoga, is body scanning, where participants are asked to imagine a light or breeze on their cheek, nose, leg, belly, etc. slowly moving through the different parts of the body.
- Reflect together.

Doodle by Kazi Izstel tracking a conversation about Utopias from the Dhaka Creative Activism Workshop, 2017. CREDIT: PAUL SHIELDS



# SECTION 3

## WORKING WITH THEORY: TOOLS TO BRING IN OTHER PERSPECTIVES



'I Want To Be A Tree' by Shaela Sharmin, Institute of Fine Arts, Creative Activism Workshop, Chittagong, Bangladesh, 2018. CREDIT: EMILIE FLOWER/ PAUL SHIELDS

*“Acknowledge the body of work which has come before us and draw from alternative interpretations of familiar narratives and practices.”*

*“Enlarging the field from which the unexpected can emerge.”*

**J.K. GIBSON-GRAHAM, AUSTRALIAN ECONOMISTS**

**We use the term theory to mean abstracted or symbolic ways of making sense of and articulating the world around us. Academic theory, including feminist theory exploring the entrenched discrimination experienced by women based on patriarchy and other intersecting systems of oppression, can be useful to help participants put ideas that they are struggling to articulate into words, or give them something to disagree with. Theory might be expressed in academic papers, but also in other ways – using metaphors like maps or expressing theoretical ideas in poetry or stories.**

Conversation at the creative activism response workshop, Chittagong, Bangladesh, 2018.  
CREDIT: EMILIE FLOWER

### **Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o - Agĩkũyũ-Kenyan writer**

*“Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world. How people perceive themselves affects how they look at their culture, at their politics and at the social production of wealth, at their entire relationship to nature and to other beings. Language is thus inseparable from ourselves as a community of human beings with a specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world.”*

theory

theory

### **Barbara Christian - African-American writer**

*“For people of color have always theorized – but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic. And I am inclined to say that our theorizing (and I intentionally use the verb rather than the noun) is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking.”*





## CARTOGRAPHY

Cartography is the study and practice of making maps.

Maps are a familiar tools for most people, even if they don't use them much themselves. The different ways that a place can be presented in maps can be used to symbolise how our habits of thinking influence the way we understand ourselves and what we count as knowledge. These habits can distort or obscure other ways of thinking about the world.

We used different kinds of maps to illustrate how systems of knowledge are distortions of reality - representing some information and making it

seem important, while leaving other information out. The ways that the powerful think about and describe the world produce sets of 'dominant ontological frameworks' (theories of existence and reality), which influence the way we see and understand the world. Maps are material illustrations of this: powerful interpretations that can distort reality and make certain perspectives seem legitimate, while marginalising others.<sup>27</sup>

### WHY IS IT USEFUL?

By using different visual representations and poetry about cartography we can see distortions and create our own, new ways of distorting reality.

## Mapping power

Maps demonstrate the malleability of facts. Comparing maps helps us to challenge the dominant ways of thinking that we live within and are encouraged to use, and to consider framing as an act that deliberately excludes as well as includes certain kinds of facts.

**Time:** 30min – 1hr

### Preparation:

Prepare a number of different maps that show the same place in different ways, from familiar maps to imaginative interpretations. These can be shared using large print outs, readings and/ or with a projector. In Uganda and Bangladesh we used, amongst others:

- different projections of the world map (including historic/prehistoric projections);
- activist maps;
- historical maps;
- imaginary maps, e.g. Thomas More's map of Utopia and Ursula LeGuin's map of Earthsea;
- navigation maps such as those used by Western and Pacific Islanders;
- maps of home;
- tactile/sensory maps;
- maps that represent unconventional perspectives;
- ordnance survey maps, star charts, geological maps, maps of the sea, and frequently used views such as GPS road maps.



**Process:**

- Introduce the group to the maps through a presentation or informal circle, passing the maps around or placing them on the floor in the centre of the group.
- Discuss the different ways that maps are used to define places, people, and knowledge whilst making others invisible, and the powerful forces behind these different interpretations.
  - *In our workshop, we introduced this process with readings of excerpts from Kei Miller’s poetic exploration of maps and ways of knowing, ‘A Cartographer Tries to Map his Way to Zion’, which describes how limited a scientific approach to mapping and knowledge can be.<sup>29</sup> We followed up with a conversation about these limitations.<sup>30</sup>*

**Project Archive: Film about walking and mapping**

‘Photographer Jim Joel Nyakaana reflects on walking and mapping’ at <https://youtu.be/xdilgBjiuNY>.



Jim Joel Nyakaana’s walking series as displayed at Cheragi 7, 2019.  
CREDIT: EMILIE FLOWER

**‘Forensic architecture’**

Forensic architecture is an emergent academic field developed at Goldsmiths University, London. Their work involves open-source investigation, the construction of digital and physical models, 3D animations, virtual reality environments and cartographic platforms that map human rights violations.

The maps work as platforms for awareness of different perspectives, collated with interdisciplinary expertise from a team of investigators that include architects, scholars, artists, filmmakers, software developers, investigative journalists, archaeologists, lawyers, and scientists - all working together to overlap knowledge in ways that tell new stories.

Find out more: <https://www.forensic-architecture.org/>

# POETRY

## Audre Lorde - African-American feminist writer

*"For women...poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought. The farthest external horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems, carved from the rock experiences of our daily lives."*<sup>31</sup>

theory

In Uganda we invited the poet Dr Susan Kiguli to share her poems and knowledge about the oral tradition of poetry. In describing her research, Susan Kiguli emphasised the centrality of messages, learning and the prophetic voice in traditional art forms. She shared a number of her poems in different workshops: poems reflecting on political struggles, reimagining origin myths and responding to our work together.

## WHY IS IT USEFUL?

*"We were all so emotional when we heard the [Susan's] poem...If we had heard the poem before then the solutions might be even more effective."*

**SCOVIA ARINAITWE, UGANDAN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER**

For some, poetry taps into strong oral traditions that may otherwise lie dormant. For others, the focus and brevity of poetry can enable them to express themselves in a new way. Reading poems builds an understanding of how different artistic products can engage different people in different ways, legitimising multiple perspectives.

*In our workshop, engaging as a group with an artistic piece was a very powerful tool. Listening to Susan's poem felt like a call to action for the participants. For some participants, it helped them to connect with their emotions and personal feelings. Other poems and songs offered a prompt for framing and rooting a conversation in local cultural references and tapping into oral traditions.*

*"There's a lot of poetry there in songs; the traditional rhythms use a lot of poetic language to communicate. So we live actually poetry in our daily lives, we don't realise. We sang play songs when we were young – the meanings were diverse and deep. ... Those stories shaped – made us who we are, you know, we are who we are because of certain stories."*

**FRED KAWOoya, ACTIONAID UGANDA**

Image of Rabindranath Tagore and woman by Rajib Gupputta exhibited at the 22nd National Art Exhibition, Shilpakala Gallery, Dhaka, 2017.  
CREDIT: EMILIE FLOWER



## Think about a wheelbarrow

An exercise for using poetry as a prompt exercise, reading a poem from different perspectives, developed by Dr Susan Kiguli.

**Time:** 1hr.

**Preparation:**

Provide a pen and 5-6 small pieces of paper for everyone in the group. Print out a copy of the Red Wheelbarrow by William Carlos Williams for reading out at the end.

**Process:**

- Start by asking the group to close their eyes and imagine a wheelbarrow.
- Ask participants to individually write a few short notes on a piece of paper about the wheelbarrow they have imagined, from the point of view of an engineer.
- When they have finished, ask them to imagine and write about (on a different piece of paper) the wheelbarrow from the point of view of a businessman, a historian, an international development worker and finally from the perspective of a poet.
- Collect the papers and group them into vocational perspectives.
- Read out the papers, comparing how they reveal the ways in which the different roles are associated with different ways of thinking, and considering what is different about how a poet approaches the world.
- Read out 'The Red Wheelbarrow' by William Carlos Williams and ask participants to share their responses to the poem.<sup>32</sup>
  - *In our workshop, Susan pointed to the simplicity, the imagery, and the complex meaning of the poem. Having just imagined the wheelbarrow from so many different points of view, the poem took on a larger meaning for the group, as well as illuminating the specific work that a poet can do to bring something to life.*

You could adapt this exercise to use a different poem that focuses on a single object. You could invite participants to reflect on issues from the perspective of a poet, read and discuss poems that others have written, and compose and perform their own poems. There is a strong relationship between poetry, song and children's rhymes – any of these genres are rich sources to tap into.

## Imagined spaces for visioning fantastical feminist futures

Creativity and the use of creative practices to explore, identify and realise alternatives to a patriarchal and oppressive world are an important component of feminism.

The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), a transnational feminist network, worked with India-based art collective the Fearless Collective to develop a toolkit for using storytelling to help activists collectively imagine feminist futures and identify narratives that make solutions irresistible.

Inspired by the indigenous Australian oral tradition of songlines – in which songs, stories and dances about ancestral paths across land and sky are used to enable indigenous people to navigate vast distances – the Fearless Collective developed a map representing the systems, structures and social constructs that participants navigate every day. The spaces related to pleasure, home, the body, resources, the economy, labour, spirituality, art, knowledge, justice, power and security.

Their toolkit proposes using poetry, personal stories and collective dreaming to help participants recognise these places as spaces for collective imaginings.<sup>33</sup>



## Project Archive: Poetry

Several poems were written as a response to the project.

- Some describe the workshop process, such as 'Reaching Within Us to Beyond Us' by Susan Kiguli: <https://youtu.be/fWTE4W7m-2g>.
- Some reflect on events that took place, such as 'After Cheragi' by Ruth Kelly,
- Some bridge personal and professional experience, like 'Should I Stay or Should I Go' by Helena Okering.

These poems can be found at [www.creativealternatives.net/artworks](http://www.creativealternatives.net/artworks) to use as prompts for discussion.

## From REACHING WITHIN US TO BEYOND US, by Susan Kiguli

*Sitting sometimes standing  
Moving in the mapped out space  
Of Makerere Art Gallery  
Reflecting on what images and words  
Can do to transform places  
To elevate a country  
It felt like this country is a book  
And we were taking it off the shelf  
Blowing away the dust  
Opening its delicate pages  
And breathing life  
Into words*

...

*We are in this art Gallery  
Where all anxiety can be  
Overthrown  
Where there is no hierarchy  
Where no one prescribes  
What language should be spoken  
Where creativity has withdrawn  
Borders and formed a  
Borderless nation.*

*We realize the resolve  
To make and perform  
Our poetry  
And we become platforms in which  
The potency of voice  
Is a reality.*



# FANTASY, UPSIDE-DOWN WORLDS AND UTOPIAS

The world is full of stories that turn power relations on their heads, distort reality and reimagine the future.

## Alessa Johns - US literature scholar

Alessa Johns argues that imaginative knowledge and speculation have long been central to feminist and proto-feminist writing: *"gender equality has never fully existed, so it must be imagined if it is to become."*

For activists whose strategies are *"constantly thwarted by reactionary political and social forces,"* utopian literature allows them to *"take time out to dream [and] facilitates the imaginative speculation necessary for generating new liberating strategies in globalized world."*<sup>34</sup>

Fantasy and utopian writing often entail characters and plots that model strategies for change, speak truth to power and break through

## Mihaela Mihai - UK-based philosopher

*"In engaging with complex plots, questioning, interpreting and judging events and characters in a novel, poem or novella, we may become aware of the limits of our concepts and deep-rooted beliefs, and of our habits of seeing – and feeling about – the social world. ...literary works insinuate themselves into the reader's memory via the imagination ... without us being fully aware of how exactly they get us to imaginatively reconfigure our memories, beliefs and emotions."*<sup>35</sup>

artificial hierarchies. As part of a workshop, they can be used as powerful models to motivate change and stimulate our imaginations.

## WHY IS IT USEFUL?

Developing greater understanding of the utopian fantasies we are familiar with (and live within) can be useful, to recognise how they limit as well as extend our imaginations. This can lead to further conversations about the way that national historical scripts – in particular those around revolution and war – dominate how we think about politics and how we imagine that change can happen.

theory

theory



## Readings

Introduce the group to different fictional accounts of the world that imagine alternative realities – science fiction, utopias and upside-down worlds are good examples of this.

**Time:** 10 min – 30 min

### Preparation:

Spend some time researching and selecting written or graphic examples of fantasy, science fiction or utopian writings to print, put into a presentation or buy for the workshop. Include well known readings and try to include some from local sources – you may want to speak to a range of people beforehand to crosscheck and discuss your choices, and some oral stories may need to be transcribed.

### Project Archive: Reading

Several examples of these kinds of stories can be found amongst the collected texts of 'Placing the Imagination: Scratchbook and Playbook' at [www.developmentalternatives.net/texts](http://www.developmentalternatives.net/texts). The book was designed by one of the artists from the project, Shohrab Jahan, and contains selected texts, illustrations, poems, photographs, interviews and reflexions from participants in the project.

### Process:

- Before the workshop select some texts to read aloud and reference to explain some of the ideas you introduce through excerpts or quotes from fiction, poetry, and/or script.
- Ask others in the group to read out pieces where appropriate. See the Storytelling section for more detail on weaving this into a process.
  - *In the Creative Arts and Activism workshop in Bangladesh we read Begum Rokeya's classic 1905 story 'Sultana's Dream', about a woman who wakes up in a world where women rule and men stay at home.<sup>36</sup> The group compared this with poem 85 from Rabindranath Tagore's book 'The Gardener', where he speaks to people in the future as though he were in a utopia.<sup>37</sup>*

### THE GARDENER 85 by Rabindinath Tagore

*Who are you, reader, reading my poems an hundred years hence?  
I cannot send you one single flower from this wealth of the spring,  
one single streak of gold from yonder clouds.  
Open your doors and look abroad.  
From your blossoming garden gather fragrant memories of the  
vanished flowers of an hundred years before.  
In the joy of your heart may you feel the living joy that sang one  
spring morning, sending its glad voice across an hundred years.*

## Using science fiction to develop emergent strategy

In the Octavia's Brood project, editors and facilitators supported US-based activists to use the process of writing science fiction to imagine alternative futures. This informed science fiction writing workshops, where participants identify an issue facing their community, work together to describe characters and settings, and then write and share stories that explore the issue and possible solutions.

Adrienne Maree Brown argues that writing science fiction gives activists the space to imagine possibilities, "*challenging the narratives that uphold current power dynamics and patterns,*" as well as facilitating the development of "*emergent strategy*", allowing writers to play with different outcomes and strategies before having to deal with real-world costs.<sup>38</sup>

An anthology of texts that influenced the project and transcripts from the participants, 'Placing the Imagination: Scratchbook and Playbook', collated into a book by sculptor Shohrab Jahan.  
CREDIT: EMILIE FLOWER



# TELLING AND RETELLING FAMILIAR STORIES

*“Stories are different than laws, for example, because they still allow for somebody else to understand what they want from it and they don’t tell it fully. If you hear that story, you’d be like oh, I kind of get it. Then when it happens to you, you still have a moment to add your own agency. So stories kind of do it better, they’re kind of like suggestion and they allow you to have your own interpretation of reality.”*

**NATASHA KHADIJJAH, FEMINIST ACTIVIST AND FEMRITE MEMBER FROM UGANDA**

Most storytelling in development and human rights work focuses on personal stories, whereas artists and writers highlight the power of imaginative or fictional storytelling.

Traditional and familiar stories shape how we see the world. By telling, discussing and reimagining those stories, participants can identify some of the influences that limit their thinking, learn to notice different elements and imagine how the world might be different.

## Donna Haraway - US feminist theorist

Donna Haraway argues that the process of retelling and subverting traditional stories and origin myths can give their tellers access to the tools of parody, irony and blasphemy that are so important to resistance.<sup>39</sup>

## WHY IS IT USEFUL?

*“The biggest disaster of colonialism institutions or rule etc, is the mental slavery, these cuffs on imagination. Africans have to do something unimaginable like trust themselves to have enough moral conscious to build new narratives of human rights.”*

**NATASHA KHADIJJAH, FEMINIST ACTIVIST AND FEMRITE MEMBER FROM UGANDA**

## Sylvia Tamale - Ugandan feminist

Sylvia Tamale points out that storytelling is closely associated with Indigenous ways of knowing and learning and fits perfectly with efforts to decolonise feminism and develop contextually-rooted understandings of justice.<sup>40</sup>

Engaging with fiction and non-fiction tests participants, taking their personal identities out of the equation to explore what is real and what is not, what is fixed and what can be changed. It taps into non-Eurocentric ways of knowing and helps participants imagine the world differently.

*“I felt pushed out of my comfort zone, I’ve been so engrained in the NGO mindset, this workshop is exactly what I needed... you completely think of things you wouldn’t have thought of before.”*

**ANINDITA DUTTA ROY, ACTIONAID**

A workshop bringing together the different tools described below is likely to take one or two days. You might want to pick and choose different elements if you have less time, and you will need to include some breaks. A tool you could use for starting this process is the **story of your name**.



# TOOL 13

## Story of your name

This approach does not ask participants to hide their professional identities, but rather encourages them to frame the discussion in terms of their origins and family relationships, while leaving flexibility for participants to take the story in other directions.

### Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o - Kenyan theorist

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o describes colonialism – and Christian conversion specifically – as a vast renaming exercise, in which people and landmarks are stripped of their African names and “branded with a European memory.”

He points to Steve Biko’s challenge for Africans – and others – to “seize back the right and the initiative to name the world by reconnecting to our memory.”<sup>41</sup>

theory

### WHY IS IT USEFUL?

Such an approach can encourage participants to bring in aspects of their identities, experience and expertise that they would not normally share in a work context.

- In the Creative Arts and Activism project, the invitation for participants to tell the story of their names led them to share stories that articulated complex ideas about patriarchy, colonialism and cultural heritage, expressed in a way that was firmly rooted in local cultural symbolism and practices of naming. Their stories reflected their family relationships and circumstances, cultural and religious influences, random bureaucratic decisions and the negotiation of patriarchal norms. They give an insight into the many different cultural references that participants might be familiar with – and that can be tapped into during the workshop.

**Time:** 15min – 1hr, depending on the size of the group

#### Process:

- Ask participants to introduce themselves by sharing the story of their name. Participants might choose to tell the others how they got their name, or they could tell a story associated with one of their namesakes or the meaning of their name.
  - One workshop participant, artist Pamela Enyonu, explained: “I was named Aobo after my grandaunt. As I was growing up, when I started to get into what names mean and ask people, what does it mean? And there were two conflicting - some people said it meant the first born, which I am, and other people say it meant pain. Now because I wasn’t sure of what it meant so I started to let go of it, as I grew older. So, Enyonu I took by force; ‘cos it was my father’s name, and it was only given to sons, and I said, hmm, I want that name, so I took it. And it’s now in all my official documents, so I took it.”

Discussion groups at the Creative Activism Workshop, Kampala 2019.

CREDIT: EMILIE FLOWER



## Telling and discussing familiar stories

*“We’re not even agreeing with this myth. The major thing we are doing, we are even refuting something, we are questioning what we are doing, we are bringing it to the floor and debating it, and so that story will stay in our psyche.”*

**SUSAN KIGULI, UGANDAN POET AND LECTURER AT MAKERERE UNIVERSITY**

**Time:** 2 – 3 hrs

### Preparation:

Identify a few stories that at least some participants are likely to be very familiar with. If possible, choose stories that exist in more than one version. Try to use a version that is ambiguous, with good and bad elements, e.g. with some elements that seem empowering and others that seem more negative. Or you might ask participants to bring a fictional story to share and work with these.

Print enough copies of the story or stories you have chosen so that each participant has their own.

*– In the Creative Arts and Activism project, we used folktales like Little Red Riding Hood, ogre stories, and origin myths like stories from the Bible and Hindu tradition and from specific communities – like the Buganda origin myth of Nambi and Kintu.*

### Process:

- Ask participants if they can remember the story well enough to retell it, or give them a version to read (highlighting that this is only one of many possible versions).
- Ask participants to share their responses to the story. They could discuss this in small groups and then come back and share with the larger group. You might want to use the following questions as a guide:
  - What are your thoughts about the story, what did you react most strongly to?
  - What aspects do you really want to change?
  - What is the effect of reading or hearing the story in a language different from the one in which it might have been first told?
- Ask participants to create a brief conversation between two of the characters, at a key moment in the story.
- Have each group perform the conversation that they composed.
- If participants have chosen the stories, at the end of the session, ask them to reflect on why they chose that story and whether they think about it differently after the session.



## Reimagining familiar stories

*“That is what a woman’s world would look like: an ideal world. If women were in control, not of the men, but of their lives. Like you have say over who you marry, how you marry, how you live, how you raise your children, how you do everything else but a lot of times that is not the case. How I wish the portrayal in this poem was how it is in real life.”*

**JENNIPHER ACHALOI, ACTIONAID REFLECTING ON SUSAN KIGULI’S POETIC REIMAGINING OF THE STORY OF NAMBI AND KINTU**

**Time:** 2 hrs

### Preparation:

Ask participants whether they know any other versions of a familiar story, or find a reinterpretation of the story that they can read. You might find a published version or commission an artist to write their own version in advance of the workshop. For example, many writers have written feminist versions of traditional folktales. It can be good to use poems as they tend to be shorter and offer a different perspective.

Prepare enough printed copies of a re-interpretation of the story you have chosen for each participant to have their own copy. If someone is going to read it aloud, give them time to read it through first.

- *In the Creative Arts and Activism project, we used a published poem reimagining the story of Nambi and Kintu and a version of Red Riding Hood written for the workshop.*

### Process:

- Ask a facilitator or participant to read the version aloud.
- Ask participants to share and discuss their responses to this new version. This could be an open conversation or guided by questions, e.g.:
  - What are the key differences between the first version they considered and the new version?
  - Does it help them notice anything different?



Pamela Nyonu reimagines the Ugandan Nambi Tongue Tie Myth in her artist response book 'Nambi'.  
CREDIT: PAMELA ENYONU



## Reflecting on the experience of storytelling

*“So this story of Nambi ... I felt like there’s a mindshift for me, it’s giving me ways to articulate some of my frustrations about my struggles. There is nothing wrong with being a woman. I don’t have to diminish myself, squeeze myself, suppress my emotions, try and be a man, because I am a woman and I am brilliant.”*

**PAMELA ENYONU, ARTIST FROM UGANDA**

**Time:** 1-2 hrs

**Preparation:**

Participants should each have a copy of the chosen story.

- Leave time between the previous exercises and this one – perhaps go and do another activity.
- Come back and have a period of open reflection. Give participants a chance to say things they might still be figuring out.
- Ask participants how telling and discussing the story was different from the kind of analysis they normally do. They could discuss this in small groups and share with the larger group. You might want to use the following questions as a guide:
  - What does it make you notice that you wouldn’t normally pay attention to?
  - What different traditions does the story bring together?
  - Are there any themes in the story that are relevant to development and human rights?
  - Does the story address these themes in ways that are different from how they would normally be addressed?
- Ask participants to go away and compose their own version of the story. This could be individually or in small groups, written and shared or performed, either the following day, or sometime later.
- Have an open discussion about the new versions that participants composed.

An anthology of stories, poems and transcripts that influenced and were produced as part of the Art, Activism and Cultural Archive project, 2020.  
CREDIT: EMILIE FLOWER



# SECTION 4

## READING ART: TOOLS TO RECORD AND RESPOND TO ART



'Keep Space Between Things', bodymap  
by Zihan Karim from the Creative  
Activism Workshop, Chittagong, 2018.  
CREDIT: EMILIE FLOWER

# Artists' work is a two-way process.

Whether they are performance artists responding to the site they are working in, or exhibiting in traditional gallery spaces, artists think about the audience perspective. They recognise that everyone has a unique perspective, and artworks prompt responses that reveal these differences and expand the meaning of the work.

Many participatory art-making projects and workshops don't reflect on the work made, the importance of framing and how it is understood by others. Collaborative art-making models new ways of being, sharing and working together, and collective reflection produces more critical conversations that allow groups to see for themselves the limitations of their existing ways of being, seeing and behaving.

## Project Archive: Film

*"We teach them to look from multiple perspectives"*

In this short interview, Professor Sheala Sharmin explains how fine art is taught at the Chittagong Fine Art Institute in Bangladesh. Here there is a long tradition of pushing students to seek out new audiences and broaden the meaning of their work. *"I ask them to see one work through lots of lenses, multiple perspectives...maybe someone who is not related to that work will find something else in it."*

*"We do ask them to do something meaningful in art. If it is just about yourself what's the big deal...we teach them how to look at art through a social lens... They have three categories; traditional, modern and contemporary art. Students get confused here sometimes, how to look at the world critically and traditionally are very different. We ask the students to look through this... You are only looking at the surface, there is politics behind that".*

<https://youtu.be/ltXmemVWU2w>

# REFLECTING ON, RECORDING AND SHARING ARTWORK

*"Galleries look very elite; people don't feel comfortable there. But if you show something in a local place, they can connect easily."*

**RAZIB DATTA, ARTIST, BANGLADESH**

## Project Archive: Film

According to artist Razib Datta, hearing different points of view from the audience broadens his own understanding of his work and expands his boundaries.

In this interview at Cheragi Art Show in Chittagong Bangladesh, he reflects on the value of audience for broadening perspective, *"When you get many points of view, they are adding something...it makes wide my boundaries"*.

See: <https://youtu.be/OtLZ7bacLS8>



Razib Datta's performance at the Cheragi Art Show 7, Chittagong, 2019.  
CREDIT: EMILIE FLOWER



## SCREENING

Screening or playing back recordings of the conversations and pieces made by workshop participants can act as a powerful prompt for reflection about performance and content. These conversations help people become aware of their own 'gaze', the experience of their spectators, and the limitations and potential that this places on their work.

Videos and sound recordings of events can be played to other audiences to prompt conversations, inspire others, extend the reach of the project activities and produce an archive of the project. Interviews with participants can help to explain the thinking behind the work and extend the breadth of the pieces. Discussions between artists and audiences after public arts performances can instigate dynamic and challenging exchanges that may push up against boundaries.

### Preparation:

Throughout the project, you may wish to use audio, photographs and film recordings of the activities to facilitate reflection and sharing. **This can only be done with the explicit, informed consent of participants.**

*– In the Creative Arts and Activism project, the team carried a laptop and projector so that the images could be played back. Some of the footage was edited down and played back in different workshops as a prompt for discussion.*

Consider what specialist equipment you may need for sharing your material, such as a projector and speakers, or a stage area and seating, and get this prepared and tested.

### Process:

- Collectively look at, listen to or watch recordings of the group's work.
- Ask participants to reflect back on what they

have made together. Reflect on the way you chose to say things and what you chose to show and not show.

- You may want to ask direct questions about
- the content that generate critical thinking,
- such as;
  - What do you think it is about?
  - What do we show? And, what don't we show?
  - What have we seen before and where?
  - Is there anything unexpected here?
- With the group, decide where and how they would like to share the materials they have produced. This may be a very informal screening/ presentation to friends, online sharing, a workshop or a formal screening or showing at a gallery or theatre.
- Work with the group to consider the audience they would like to share the pieces with. This is likely to require help with logistics – which could be someone from the group or a specialist.
- Seek out different locations for showing the work, where it may reach different audiences. For many artists, the space in which their work is shown is part of the work itself, and will have an influence on the quality and content of the conversations that can take place.
- Ask participants to note the ways that different audiences receive their work, and their varying understandings of it. This can show a lot about themselves and their audience. Devise some questions beforehand to prompt further discussions about topics you would like to delve into.
  - *In York, UK, two films were screened to a cramped studio full of academics, activists and artists: 'Communion,' a short film reflecting on performance and reality, written and produced after the workshop by Ugandan screenwriter Patience Nitumwesiga; and 'A Landscape Activity' a film by installation artist, Shohrab Jahan and the Jog Art Space in Chittagong, Bangladesh. The open floor with the artists had a tension and vibrancy as the audience members pulled the conversation in different directions across different disciplines and challenged the artists' explanations of their work.*

### **Project Archive: Film on the power of audience**

Sheala Sharmin, Lecturer at the Chittagong Fine Arts Institute reflects on the power of audience. *"We shouldn't underestimate the people; they ask questions like a sharp knife... People will ask questions to the artists and the artists will face those questions. These kinds of things should happen, we don't want to get content."*

See: [https://youtu.be/VM\\_-9 JsAw4](https://youtu.be/VM_-9 JsAw4).

### **Project Archive: The Cheragi Art Show**

The Cheragi Art Show was created by Jog Art Space to open a space for questions, mystery and dialogue between the public and artists, and between artists from Chittagong and beyond. The space is curated through a collaborative process of team discussion. There is no written interpretation or explanatory texts to accompany the art. This is an intentional decision to encourage reflection and elevate the audience's personal perspectives. All artists are present to discuss the work with the public.

In December 2019, over 1500 people were estimated to have visited the show. Several of the project team took part, producing exhibits and observing audience reactions. People came up with different but often overlapping interpretations, as well as asking the artists for theirs. The aim was to encourage people to engage more personally with the work and its meaning.

To see a short film about Cheragi Art Show 7 go to: <https://youtu.be/RrfycgGclgg>



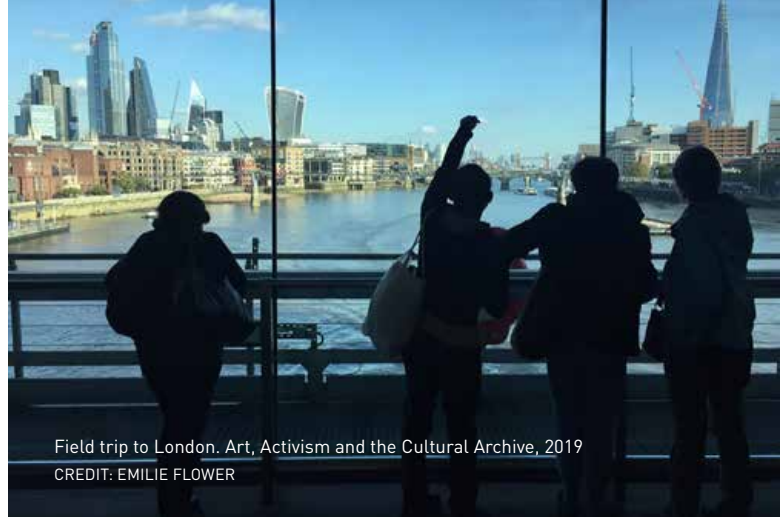
## GROUP FIELD TRIPS

### Researching other artworks

This is a good way to prompt reflections and discussions about the visual scenery you live within, the meaning of repeating motifs or images, the overlapping histories and historical narratives that are represented, and the forms that are used to do this.

Build awareness of the local 'arts scene' and scenery by visiting arts and activist spaces together. Arts-related examples could include museums, galleries, archives, artist studios, street shows, workshops, performances, plays, concerts, national sites of interest and arts institutions. This is an important process for providing more informal conversations to take place within the team, developing new ideas and shaping projects in relation to a specific arts-based working context.

- *In Uganda, Bangladesh and the UK the team visited contemporary and traditional arts performances and galleries, heritage spaces and artists together. In London, they visited the Black Archive, Feminist Archive, Tate Modern, British Museum, Wellcome Trust exhibits, Whitechapel Gallery, and Saint Martin's College of Fine Art in London, and the Bloodaxe Poetry Archive and a John Akomfrah exhibit at the Baltic Arts Centre in Newcastle. This fieldwork prompted a series of conversations about the artistic process, such as preservation, memory, public art and monumentalism, and themes being explored by the artists such as climate change, feminism and de-colonisation.*
- *The Creative Alternatives project led to a follow-on project that involved exploring archives and producing street art to increase awareness of different art histories and the methods artists use for expanding the public political imagination.*



Field trip to London. Art, Activism and the Cultural Archive, 2019  
CREDIT: EMILIE FLOWER

### WHY IS IT USEFUL?

Visiting and critiquing art works is useful for learning about the arts scene, and also taps into local cultural traditions and practices. This is likely to motivate and encourage activists to reach out to other allies and a broader spectrum of activism, political commentary, resistance and reinforcement. It can also challenge ideas that have become isolated or irrelevant.

**Time:** These group trips can range from an afternoon or morning, such as an evening poetry slam or gig, to a longer creative exchange. Allow time for the event, as well as for discussion and reflection.

#### Preparation:

Informal and spontaneous visits are useful, but to make the most of these visits contact the places beforehand to arrange a tour or ask someone in the team to research and lead. Plan an itinerary, leaving plenty of time for each visit. Ask participants to help with this process, or follow up on workshop suggestions. You will need to budget for any transport and entrance costs.

#### Process:

- Try to move around as a team, to provide a chance for immediate reflections together.
- Questions for group reflection during and after the visits may include:
  - Who are the heroes of the nation? Is this where we learnt about these heroes?
  - Which images repeat and where?
  - What is missing – where can we find other histories and alternative representations?
  - How are people depicting the future and why are they doing it in this way?



# SECTION 5

# WORKING

# COLLABORATIVELY:

# TOOLS FOR

# WORKING AS A TEAM



'Participatory observers', bodymap by Shohrab Jahan at the Creative Activism Workshop, Dhaka, 2017.  
CREDIT: EMILIE FLOWER

# Strengthen alliances across disciplines and roles, and model alternative ways of working together

Working together to critically assess what you have made, seen and heard can promote understanding of the significance of how the work is framed and presented, and how it is likely to be received and understood from different perspectives.

## TEAM ETHNOGRAPHY

The workshops were accompanied by a form of team ethnography. Ethnography is the practice of studying people in their own environment, usually through direct observation and participation. The team researched the perspectives and political imaginations of those who produced, sustained and viewed art in their working context, both in the wider world and through interviews and discussions.

This method does not use predesigned questions or forms to gather specific data. Rather, it encourages the researcher to gain awareness of a broader set of variables that make up a place and event. The researcher is as likely to draw their 'data' from conversations, gestures and "gossip" they see and hear, as they are from the words spoken in a set interview.

## WHY IS IT USEFUL?

By participating in the activities themselves, group members can act as participant observers, watching what is going on, recording events and discussing activities with those attending and other members of the team. Multicultural teams can generate comparative and fresh reflections, which in turn can generate broader understandings of the parallel arts 'scenes' that exist in their local contexts, and alternative models for working.

theory

### Sarah Pink - UK anthropologist

Sarah Pink suggests that ethnographers can collect rich and valid data about other people's worlds even in relatively short time periods, by paying attention to what they perceive with their senses as they share activities and practices with those participating in the research.

In recording and reflecting on a workshop, we should try to take into account the many different factors that influence the ways we interact with others – and how the power relationships between us play out: our different types of bodies and minds, our physical surroundings and what we pick up with our senses, the languages and discourses we use, how the local context is affected by global power dynamics, and the range of skills, experiences and expertise that participants bring.<sup>42</sup>

## Doing team ethnography

Working in a team allows team members to switch roles – from facilitation to observation – and compare notes. During team ethnography, different people are likely to pick up on different elements of an experience and understand what happened differently. Reflecting on themes and experiences together can ensure that the team develop a richer, more multifaceted understanding of what is happening. It gives team members the opportunity to think about what is happening together and challenge their initial assumptions, in a way that is much more difficult if a researcher or facilitator is working alone.

**Time:** Ongoing throughout.

### Project Archive: Film: “This is the beauty of research”

Duniya Khandokhar reflects on the ethnographic method used in the project. “This is the beauty of research...you just be there...you try to understand people’s life, what that place is saying to you...that thing is automatically communicating with you. If you want to understand what that society really is.” See <https://youtu.be/GQ55bJrkXIk>

### Possible processes:

- If you visit exhibits and shows as a group, ask the team to reflect on what they see, hear and feel as they walk around, and afterwards. Decide how to take notes as a team and provide a notebook and pen for team researchers.
- Encourage the team to develop questions of interest as part of collaborative ethnographies, building on themes from previous sessions. They can use these thematic conversations to guide observations and questions during fieldwork, and in reflections. As the work

continues, hold regular discussions with the team to refine these questions or decide which areas to focus on.

- For project-related screenings, performances or shows, allocate someone to introduce the work and prepare a list of possible questions for the team to discuss with audiences afterwards. It may help to provide some examples of open questions, such as:
  - What did you think of the piece?
  - What do you think the piece was about and how was this conveyed?
  - Which pieces or moments stood out for you and why?
  - How did the piece make you feel?
- The collective ethnography process may include interviews with artists, activists, academics and audiences. **The informed consent of interviewees must always be secured before conducting an interview.** Prepare a project information sheet and consent form to use in longer interviews.
  - *In the Creative Arts and Activism project, participants focused interviews on the specialisms of the people they were speaking to, allowing them to lead the conversations and pull the research themes in new directions. In interviews with audiences, they focused on their perspectives on the work and context.*
- Hold a discussion with the team about the ethics of the team ethnography exercise as described above:
- Share and discuss the data collected. This can be supported with digital recordings to act as prompts, noting down quotations and observations, reflection diaries and staging follow on conversations to share perspectives. When engaging practising artists, academics and activists as researchers, the data they gather does not always need to be recorded. Insights, new imaginations and ideas that resonate may take some time to form, and will be shared over time through their work.
  - *The principal method we used to present the data recorded was by recycling and transmitting the ideas through conversations within the team and with colleagues, and as prompts for conversation pieces in workshops and presentations with a wider audience.*



**Project Archive: Film**

Animator Raihan Ahmed Rafi talks about the character of the Cheragi street show and how it allows him to ask open questions through his work and conversations with the audience as part of his approach to life. After all, he says, "life is a research".

See <https://youtu.be/6tb0QUmNY2U>

# COLLABORATIVELY RUN WORKSHOPS, RESIDENCIES & EXHIBITIONS

Producing work together in particular places and spaces can draw attention to the strengths of those places and set in flow an exchange of skills. Running events and making work together can enable team members to learn from each other as the project evolves.

- *In the Creative Arts and Activism project, the team designed immersive experiences where they stayed and worked together and took part in specific arts-based activities.*

## WHY IS IT USEFUL?

Making artwork together enables groups of people to rehearse models for collaborating and working as a group.

Sharing power and swapping roles allows the group to grow different skills and understand each other's worlds. This is not always a smooth process. As well as motivating and liberating people, producing artwork together throws up tensions, disagreements and failures to see through ideas. This can be challenging, but rewarding, to move through.

- *The Art, Archive and Activism project group produced a collaborative installation for York Design Week. This was challenging for the artists, who all had different ideas about how they wanted to present their work. The process led them to question their collaboration, but also helped them to understand each other's work better and more actively seek overlaps in their ideas. By the time they produced their final exhibit, they had formed their own model for working. Despite setbacks in securing the location and materials, their exhibition came together and was enjoyed by hundreds of people visiting the museum. (see photos and a short film 'A Temporary Exhibition')*

**Project Archive: Film**

Shohrab Jahan reflects on the unexpected results of collaboration, exchange and the value of failure. "When real time collaboration happens we fail to explain, before we have logic."

See <https://youtu.be/QGP0jjxY9lk>

Sheela Sharmin describes the organic way that the Cheragi Street Show model formed: "we wanted to do something collective, not just for ourselves, that would be too individualistic ...it was spontaneous"

See <https://youtu.be/yXcAlzZsFtM>

Artist and art historian Shaela Sharmin, one of the founders of Jog Art and lecturer at the Fine Art Institute in Chittagong describes the process of producing a street exhibition, 2019.

CREDIT: EMILIE FLOWER



## Collaborative exhibits

### Preparation:

Where possible, allow participants to lead the process of planning their work, but be ready to provide backup support. Depending on the scale of the event this can range from a few phone calls and help with transport, to letters of introduction, planning itineraries and curation. Discuss the logistics before any event to work out what help will be needed, and whether you need to bring in specialist skills that you cannot source within the group, e.g. film making, curation, graphic design, events or project management. Try to work to the strengths of your group.

### Process:

- The team may wish to explore different options to immerse themselves in collaborative arts-based activities. This may involve:
  - Making work with artists.
  - Presenting these pieces as art. This can include the production of books, exhibitions in formal and informal spaces, film screenings, poetry readings and music.
  - Reflecting on the pieces and the experience of making them together.
- The artists, activists, practitioners and academics making up a team should be encouraged to visit and work in each other's spaces during workshops and residencies.
  - *In the Creative Arts and Activism project, these exchanges generated periods of focused work, new works and new and open cross-cultural collaborations.*
  - *In Uganda, Shohrab Jahan undertook a residency at the Makerere Fine Arts Institute with the support of Dr Lilian Nabulime (lecturer and sculptor) and Professor George Keyune (lecturer, art historian and sculptor). During this time, he worked on a life-sized wax sculpture, helped by a group of student volunteers. He would not have been able to make a wax cast of a nude figure in Chittagong. He also ran a workshop in the Makerere Gallery for students at the Institute on his working process, design and installations.*



School children interact with a wax sculpture by Shohrab Jahan, 'Reading Poetry, Burning Head' at the Uganda National Museum, 2019.

CREDIT: EMILIE FLOWER

### Project Archive: In response to interest in bringing its archives to life, the team produced a temporary collaborative exhibition for the National Museum of Uganda.

Ugandan photographer Jim Joel worked with archivists to photograph spearheads from the museum archives. For Jim, the spears demonstrate the diversity of craftsmanship in Ugandan history, call into question national borders and evoked memories from childhood.

Emilie Flower created a clay path and film installation in the exhibition space, with help from the artist response team and volunteers from the Makerere Fine Arts Institute. Walking in the wet clay disrupted standard museum protocols and also surfaced memories for people of their childhoods.

The exhibition opened with poetry readings from Ruth Kelly and Susan Kiguli, as Olivia, the life-sized wax sculpture by Shohrab Jahan arrived and was lit like a giant candle. Over the four-day exhibition hundreds of schoolchildren visited the national museum, and questioned the meaning and purpose of the works.

See: A Temporary Exhibition, Uganda National Museum, March 2020: <https://youtu.be/e0nYS1coKLg>

# SECTION 6

# EXTENDING

# CREATIVE

# ACTIVISM: TOOLS

# FOR EXPANDING

# YOUR CREATIVE

# ACTIVISM



'Sultana Having a Dream', bodymap by Ribon Khandokar at the Creative Activism Workshop, Dhaka, 2017.

CREDIT: EMILIE FLOWER



How do you go forward together as a collaboration for change, tapping into what others have done and are doing?

## ART AS A CREATIVE RESPONSE

Inviting artists in activist spaces as researchers and asking them to produce open responses to project themes and work can help to increase the transparency and reach of your project. Artists responses can help to translate work into alternative human rights languages.

The artist's response could be an extension of their existing body of work or a new direction. The intention is to support the realisation of an idea rather than provide a translation of the project.

**It is important that artists are remunerated adequately for their time and creative efforts.**

- *The Creative Arts and Activism project designed innovative funding for artists, providing a no strings attached grant to four of the artists that had attended the workshops to produce work inspired by the themes (see page 16).*

### WHY IS IT USEFUL?

Artists may respond to themes in a new way, introducing new connections and alternative ways of understanding familiar problems. The ideas that are shared and the way in which they are shared is no longer in the control of the activist's organisation, they take on a life of their own. The pieces are likely to reach new audiences that might otherwise be hard for activists to reach.

#### Project Archive: Film

Sheala Sharmin describes why artists often respond to societal taboos, and how issues in society influence artists, "Maybe they reject us, maybe they laugh at us, maybe they don't like it ...that's how we try to reach people and communicate some issues that they need to think about".

Sharad Das describes the work he produced for the 2020 Cheragi Art Show as a political metaphor drawing directly from the Rohingya crisis, by reflecting on the history of dislocation.

See <https://youtu.be/NNILYHhK2f8>



The Red Pillow by Sharad Jahan at Cheragi 7, 2019.  
CREDIT: EMILIE FLOWER

## Artist response

### Preparation:

Keep a look out for artists that you find interesting and develop your awareness of local artists' work. Speak in person to an artist before engaging them, ideally attend an event together and if possible collaborate on a small piece of work to see if you can have an open and discursive working relationship.

### Process:

- Invite (and pay) artists to join project activities, and ask them to generate an artistic response to the project themes.
  - *In the case of the Creative Arts and Activism project, the themes were: opening the cultural archive; expanding the political imagination; and disrupting the performances, scripts and translations of development.*
- The art piece/s or performances may be literal, conceptual or run parallel to conversations that take place during project workshops and exhibits, and may or may not address development and activist scripts directly.
  - *In Uganda, artists joined other artists to*

*assist with making exhibition works, and attended the storytelling workshop to research their response. In some cases, project documentation, film clips and anonymised interview transcripts were shared with the artists to strengthen, focus or clarify their research.*

- Allow artists complete freedom of expression if possible, many of them will bring in ideas that complement your work, even if the message is not designed to be easily understood or takes a more ambiguous form.
- With a free remit, artists do not always produce the work that people expect - some work may be offensive, entrench troubling stereotypes or transgress human rights norms. This should be acknowledged as a possibility. Organisations may want to install some boundaries with the artist they are working with to ensure respect for project participants and underlying project values, (for example, ActionAid's zero tolerance to any form of discrimination based on race, gender, age, sexual orientation etc.), but there is a delicate balancing act between control and freedom of expression. An option is to discuss these boundaries as part of the project or tie them to the themes.



'Garbage Path', installation at the Cheragi Art Show 7, 2019.  
CREDIT: EMILIE FLOWER



## Project Archive: Landscape Happening

As a response to the Creative Activism workshop, sculptor Shohrab Jahan produced a site-specific installation on a popular harbourside in Chittagong. He installed a bright red sculpture of a man looking through binoculars at animated birds projected above a far-off ship.

The artist intentionally left the meaning of the piece open to interpretation, allowing the public to make meaning from the artwork and generate conversations about the missing birds. During the workshop several of the activists had brought up issues of conservation and the environment.

See the film, 'Landscape Happening' <https://vimeo.com/274094251> to view this piece.

Another group of artists produced a clearer message, the audience walked along a pathway of rubbish as their response to the waste problem in Dhaka, 'Pathway' Cheragi Art Show 7 <https://youtu.be/m6DOV03LZ3c>

**More on playlist: Art, Activism and Archive**  
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLbMLV63wP5YP6uZVB5Reb-On-olDj2mqy>

## How does this link to development and human rights work?

One study of and with gender advisers in development NGOs and agencies found that they are often "on the edge" – identifying with activists in the women's movement, while also being part of bigger bureaucracies. This can put them in a good position to try to bring about change.

They have a critical consciousness of how the 'normal' way of doing things in a bureaucracy might seem strange to those outside the system. This helps them to understand that what seems inevitable can actually be changed, giving them valuable insights that they can use to develop effective strategies for changing systems that they are also part of.

Engaging with the arts is likely to help such practitioners to develop a critical consciousness that can inform this work.

Landscape Happening artists response by  
 Shohrab Jahan in Chittagong.  
 CREDIT: KAUSER HAIDER





# CREATIVE ACTIVISM FOR COMMUNICATION AND ADVOCACY

There are many different ways to expand your creative activism. This toolkit focuses on some of the ways we have done this in the Creative Arts and Activism project, thinking about art as a tool for generating new conversations, challenging prevailing ways of thinking and seeing, and opening up civic space.

For ideas on how creative activism can be used for direct action and as a communication or advocacy tool, we have included some of the best resources we have come across below.

## **Preparation:**

Wherever possible take note of the art and artist/activist projects you see and hear about that interest you, generate discussion and demonstrate change. Think about what they did and how. Initiate conversations with colleagues or put out a call to people you think may be interested to share examples, and gather a group of likeminded colleagues who would like to experiment and develop some projects together.

### **Project Archive: Direct Action**

In Uganda there was a lot of discussion of the ways in which activists already used objects and symbolic gestures as political metaphors during direct action. The anonymous Ugandan youth platform, The Jobless Brotherhood, released Yellow Pigs into Parliament to symbolise corruption within the political party associated with the colour yellow. Women in Northern Uganda employed a traditional protest, occupying the United Nations headquarters and stripping to draw attention to the loss of their land to agribusiness. In Bangladesh, activists commissioned graphic artists to design new superhero model feminists. Beautiful Trouble: A Toolbox for Revolution is a comprehensive resource for participatory advocacy and creative resistance: <https://beautifultrouble.org/>

### **Project Archive: Craftivists**

There are many art mediums that are not mentioned in this toolkit that would be equally useful for expanding people's imaginations. For example by producing music together and through the use of handicrafts such as quilting, a form of gentle protest often referred to as craftivism. In the Navigating Risk project run at the Centre for Applied Human Rights, Mexican textile artist Rosa Borrás produced a quilt made from the shirts of protestors that she embroidered with quotes from the transcripts of human rights defenders navigating risk. The quilt was displayed in several exhibitions and led to the formation of a quilt-making group in York, UK. See Sarah Corbett's <https://craftivist-collective.com/> for more examples and an article about this movement globally; <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/transformation/when-crafts-become-activism/>

### Project Archive: **Arctivists**

The Covid-19 pandemic has limited the civic spaces available for generating creative activism. This has led to the formation of many new experimental platforms for sharing work, archiving experience, strengthening communities and generating conversations in online spaces; podcasts, online theatrical spaces, sonic maps, participatory film collages, radio shows, colouring collectives, conversation spaces and radio roundtables. The Arctivist project from the Centre for Applied Human Rights at the University of York has many examples of work produced by artists and activists using a whole range of artistic mediums in response to shrinking civic space during the Covid-19 Pandemic. (see arctivist project site <https://www.hrdhub.org/arctivism>). For more examples of arctivists working to hold civic space open see the French site 'Decouvrier' that brings together activists, artists and theorists; <https://www.revue-ballast.fr/category/decouvrir/>

### Project Archive: **Audio-visual case studies**

In the Pushing Back project, audio visual case studies were used to describe the political and culturally-informed dexterity of activists as they negotiate shrinking civic space. The project focused on the value of audio-visual materials for capturing and transmitting the details of people's everyday experience as evidence, using film, newspaper style articles, podcasts and zines to make the examples easier to access. See [www.developmentalternatives.net/pushing-back](http://www.developmentalternatives.net/pushing-back) to view these case studies.

Migrant women's resilience in Spain, 'YoSoySomos' with the Alianza de Las Solidaridad.  
CREDIT: ALIANZA DE LA SOLIDARIDAD



## ART AND ACTIVISM

There is a long history of activists using the arts to expand human rights agendas and a lot of hope placed in art to do the work that facts alone cannot do: engaging audiences, touching people emotionally, igniting imaginations, providing heroic and inspiring examples of change, and translating dry facts and figures into more accessible campaigns, stories and advocacy projects.

*“Artists are not afraid of expressing themselves very freely, even in our society. We are able to do a lot of things that the general public won’t have the courage to do, because we are artists. Sometimes we feel like the artist and artists are being ridiculed but that’s not a problem, because you need to cross the boundaries.”*

**SHEALA SHARMIN, CHITTAGONG INSTITUTE OF FINE ARTS, BANGLADESH**

Looking at countless examples from across African history, Karin Barber argues that even in extremely repressive situations, creative expression can be used to “keep open a small space” – to assert an alternative way of being in the world in defiance of the ways that those in power oppress and limit populations.<sup>45</sup>

This toolkit focuses on one aspect of the work that art can do: using the arts to generate conversations that challenge entrenched habits and dominant narratives, and help us imagine new ways of thinking, of doing our work and of being in the world.

There is a wide body of research on art and activist collaborations, that explains how art can work to change civil society and secure human rights.

### Three ways art can be used in activism

Mark Stern and Susan Seifert, from the US based arts activism organisation Animating Democracy, identify three ways that artist-activists engage with their communities.<sup>46</sup>

- 1. Using art in ‘didactic’ or persuasive ways**, to convince audiences of a message, or increase participants’ awareness of their situation and their capacity to change it;
- 2. Using art in ‘discursive’ ways**, to encourage conversation and connections that might say the unsayable, upend familiar orders and ideas, and drive change;<sup>47</sup>
- 3. Using art in ‘ecological’ ways**, where cultural activities have spillover effects – or unintended consequences – that increase social capital and community capacity. Art is not just a tool for professionals and activists to empower others and to open civic space, but is also a language people use to describe and hold democratic space open.

### Popular culture and activism:

Art spills out onto walls, into song, over the airwaves and on social media platforms, and is often a prominent part of activist struggles. Collective song, for example, is a feature of virtually every uprising, used to mobilise and inspire people, to de-escalate tense situations and to unify people emotionally. In response to social change, new words might be sung to familiar tunes, new meanings attached to familiar songs or new, improvised compositions made popular. Songs about past struggles sustain those events in collective memory and provide impetus for future action.<sup>48</sup>

The arts too can sometimes be used as a tool of oppression and propaganda. Any given cultural tradition is liable to be hijacked by the powerful and interpreted or manipulated to their advantage.



### James Scott - US political theorist

James Scott argues that the more threatening and arbitrary the political environment, the more likely it is that people with less power will make political interventions in creative and indirect ways. They might express their ideas and make demands using “*rumour, gossip, disguises, linguistic tricks, metaphors, euphemisms, folktales, ritual gestures...*”<sup>49</sup>

### Abdullahi An-Na'im - Sudanese legal scholar

Abdullahi An-Na'im encourages disadvantaged groups and individuals to challenge the monopolisation and manipulation of cultural traditions. They should propose alternative interpretations “in support of their own interests,” which might be expressed in intellectual, artistic or scholarly work or various forms of political action.<sup>50</sup>

### Project Archive: Film, 'What is the Use of Art?'

In this interview with Bangladeshi artist and professor, Sheala Sharmin discusses the question, “*What is the use of art?*”.

See <https://youtu.be/dEsRCDcYprM>

Animation by Raihan Ahmed Rafi made for the the landscape happening, Chittagong, 2018.  
CREDIT: Raihan Ahmed Rafi



## INSPIRATIONAL RESOURCES

### CREATIVE ACTIVISM

- **Development Alternatives Network:** The project archive of methods, film prompts and artworks that have been profiled in this toolkit can be found at the Development Alternatives Network website.: [www.developmentalternatives.net](http://www.developmentalternatives.net)
- **ActionAid's Reflection-Action** website features a number of participative tools and methods, many of which use creative approaches to explore issues and inform strategies for change. [https://www.reflectionaction.org/tools\\_and\\_methods/](https://www.reflectionaction.org/tools_and_methods/)
- **The Campaigners Toolkit** is described as a unique collection of more than 1,000 resources for activists and organisers, including workshop resources, case studies and articles. <https://www.thechangeagency.org/campaigners-toolkit/>
- **The Centre 4 Creative Activism** has many free resources to build and sustain creative activism. <https://c4aa.org/resources>
- **InsightShare** is a participatory video organization, who produce handbooks that include techniques, games and exercises, case studies and technical guidance for the use of participatory video. <https://insightshare.org/resources/>
- **A Blade of Grass** is a US-based art organization supporting socially engaged artists through fellowships, events, publications, and documentary film. Their website has examples of collective arts activities that use art as a process to catalyse social change. <https://www.abladeofgrass.org/>
- **The Culture Group** are an influential collective of activists, artists and researchers. Their report, 'Making Waves: A Guide to Cultural Strategy' (2013) has a clear theory of change for using art to produce social action. <http://revolutionsperminute.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Making-Waves-The-Culture-Group.pdf>

- **Animating Democracy** is a well-established activist art thinktank in the US that puts emphasis on how to build individual, collective and community capacity. In addition to the introduction of new ideas and perspectives and empathic understanding through the arts, they emphasise the need to create new relationships, networks, and engagement in community efforts to activate conscientious but passive audiences to make change. <https://animatingdemocracy.org/resources/tools/>

### YOUNG PEOPLE

- **IoDeposito** is a NGO that works with the aim of supporting young people's competencies related to visual arts projects, training and research in the fields of cultural management, art and curatorial practices, <https://www.iodeposito.org/en/about/>
- **Resound** runs creative lab projects. <http://resonar.net/projects/>

### FEMINISM

- **Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)** is a global feminist network that has produced several toolkits:
  - Fearless Futures is a toolkit that clarifies the link between the arts, storytelling and activism/movement, especially for those engaged in campaigning and advocacy work. <https://www.awid.org/download-fearless-futures-toolkit>
  - Feminist Realities toolkit. <https://www.awid.org/resources/feminist-realities-our-power-action-exploratory-toolkit>
- **CREA** is a feminist international human rights organisation based in and led by women from the Global South. Their website features various toolkits, including the Achieving Transformative Feminist Leadership: A Toolkit for Organisations and Movements. <https://creaworld.org/resource/feminist-leadership-toolkit/>

## SHRINKING CIVIC SPACE

- **Dejusticia**, a Colombian thinktank, recently released a playbook for human rights actors pushing back against shrinking civic space. <https://cdn.dejusticia.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Rising-to-the-populist-challenge-VERSION-FINAL-PARA-WEB-1.pdf>
- **Civicus** do a lot of work on closing civic space: <https://www.civicus.org/>. They have an annual report on the state of civil society: <https://www.civicus.org/index.php/media-center/reports-publications/socs-reports> and an evolving resources page: <https://www.csis.org/programs/international-consortium-closing-civic-space-iccn/resources>
- **The International Centre for Not-for-profit Law (ICNL)** have a useful resource to monitor civic space. <http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/index.html>.
- **Open Global Rights** tools and practical guides also have useful information on civic space monitoring. <https://www.openglobalrights.org/instead-of-shrinking-space-lets-talk-about-humanitys-shared-future/?lang=English>

## CREATIVE RESEARCH

- **The Endangered Archive programme** (<https://eap.bl.uk/>) and University of California Los Angeles library for digitising endangered materials. <https://www.library.ucla.edu/partnerships/modern-endangered-archives-program>
- **Forensic Architecture** is an independent research agency based at Goldsmiths, University of London. Their team of investigators includes architects, scholars, artists, filmmakers, software developers, investigative journalists, archaeologists, lawyers, and scientists. <https://www.forensic-architecture.org/>
- **SELMA research centre** explores the interrelations between storytelling, experientiality and memory. <https://selmacentre.com/>





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**ActionAid** is a global movement of people working together to achieve greater human rights for all and defeat poverty. We believe people in poverty have the power within them to create change for themselves, their families and communities. ActionAid is a catalyst for that change.

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