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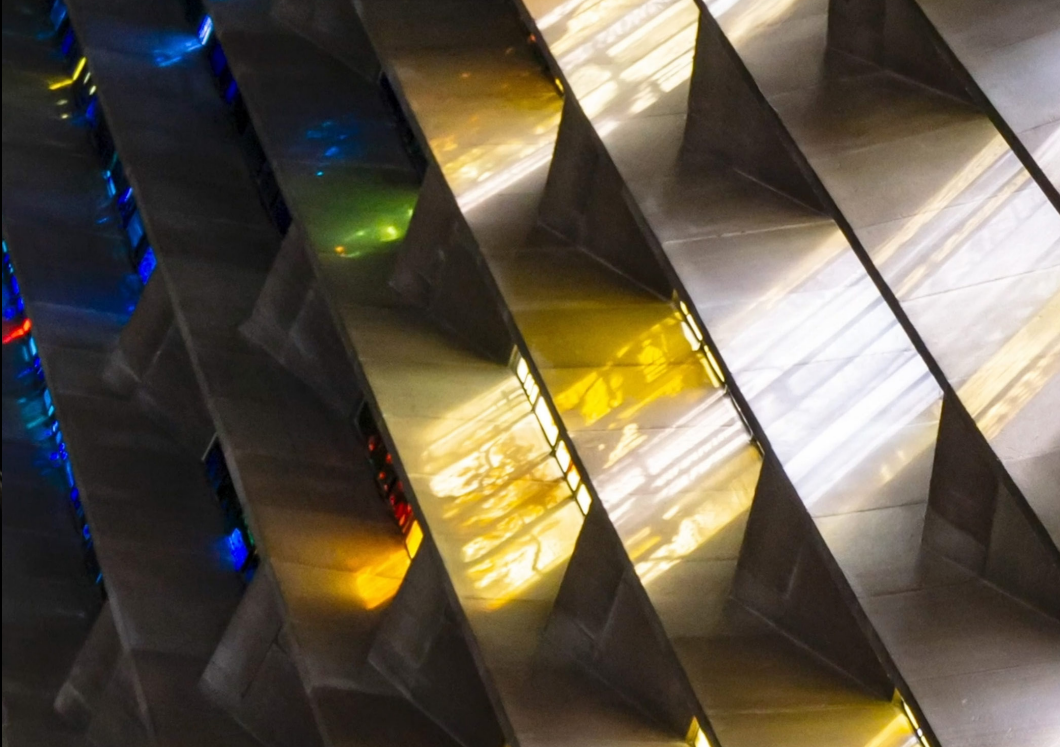
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**Artist-Researcher  
Collaborations with  
Coventry Creates:**  
sharing knowledge and  
inspiring innovation



Professor Jackie Hodgson  
and Emily Dunford

**WARWICK**  
THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

# Overview of Coventry Creates

In December 2017, Coventry was announced as the UK City of Culture 2021. The University of Warwick and Coventry University are Principal Partners in the City of Culture project, with both universities engaged in the ongoing development of the regional cultural sector. Following the announcement of Coventry's success, the two universities have further strengthened their partnership and their connections with the city and its communities, through joint work programmes around monitoring and evaluation and research; the City of Culture University Partnership group; and a Memorandum of Understanding to underpin long-term collaboration.

During the spring of 2020, as the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in national and international restrictions to curb the spread of the virus, the University Partnership recognised that research could not go ahead in the usual way. They also recognised that the cultural industries faced widespread venue closures, job and contract losses, along with funding withdrawal. In response to the foreseen critical failure in the cultural industries, the University Partnership designed and funded an innovative project, Coventry Creates, that could support artists local to the Coventry area by commissioning them to work with researchers, bringing new perspectives and new audiences to a variety of academic work.



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The Coventry Creates city-wide call attracted applications from researchers and artists who applied as individuals or as artist-researcher pairs. During the commissioning process, the University Partnership funded 18 local artists to respond to, and work with, researchers from Coventry University and the University of Warwick. Projects included poetry, music, augmented reality experiences and more, covering questions from many research disciplines. The wide range of resulting projects were presented in a digital exhibition, [www.coventrycreates.co.uk](http://www.coventrycreates.co.uk), launched in September 2020.

The evaluation of Coventry Creates is discussed further ahead. In addition to the evaluation, which produced a report and recommendations for future iterations of the programme, we facilitated a roundtable discussion in June 2021 to understand how artists and researchers perceived and undertook collaborative projects together. Coventry Creates participants joined the discussion along with University of Warwick staff involved in collaborative research practices, and the Artistic Director of the Coventry Biennial of Contemporary Art. The Coventry Biennial is an additional example of a programme which includes artist-researcher collaboration; the insights gained from hearing about this and other artist-researcher collaborative projects were valuable for the creation of this document.

Following the initial iteration of Coventry Creates, Arts Council England awarded funding for a second Coventry Creates funding call in 2021. The second Coventry Creates call will build on the learning gained during the first to develop enhanced opportunities for relationship development and networking, and skills training.

This guide is intended to share knowledge gained during the process of facilitating Coventry Creates. Here, we share the impacts of the programme for artists and researchers, indicating the benefits and challenges of these artist-researcher collaborations. We hope that the information shared will inform and encourage individuals and institutions in undertaking collaborative art-research projects in future.

# Coventry Creates Evaluation

Professor Jacqueline Hodgson was awarded an ESRC Impact Acceleration Account grant (grant reference, ES/T502054/1) to fund an evaluation of Coventry Creates. Emily Dunford was appointed as researcher on the project as her PhD explores the nature of Coventry City of Culture, complementing Professor Hodgson's social science expertise and her role as University of Warwick lead on City of Culture research. The project evaluated how researchers' engagement with arts and culture might develop the impact of their work, as well as exploring the wider benefits of the collaborations both for artists and researchers. To assess how the artist-researcher collaboration impacted the work of Coventry Creates participants, and how both universities acted at speed to operationalise this novel project, interviews with participants, those commissioning the work, and administrators were carried out from August 2020 - March 2021. The process of semi-structured interviews was chosen as a methodology in order to provide freedom for interviewees to share their experiences in response to open questions. Following the interviews, a thematic analysis was undertaken to analyse the responses.

The evaluation of Coventry Creates found that significant impacts of the scheme were experienced by both artists and researchers. Participants reported increased levels of confidence in their work and developed strong working relationships with their collaborators which helped them build skills in communication and technical working practices. Artists and researchers found that participating in Coventry Creates encouraged them to think about their work in novel ways, in some cases using a new method to produce their projects. Researchers frequently noted that working with their artist collaborator had allowed them to find a different aspect to their research (in particular, emotional aspects of their research). For their part, artists often found that the research collaboration added specificity to their work.

This evaluation will be used to inform future collaborations between artists and researchers, including further iterations of Coventry Creates and collaborative research projects, as well as developments in university collaborative practices in Coventry and the West Midlands region.

The Report is available at:

[https://warwick.ac.uk/about/cityofculture/coventry-creates/evaluation/coventry\\_creates\\_evaluation\\_18\\_june\\_2021.pdf](https://warwick.ac.uk/about/cityofculture/coventry-creates/evaluation/coventry_creates_evaluation_18_june_2021.pdf)

## Insights from Coventry Creates

The insights below have been informed by the evaluation of the initial Coventry Creates programme of commissions and a roundtable discussion which took place in June 2021 between artists and researchers who had taken part in Coventry Creates collaborations or the Coventry Biennial. During the roundtable discussion, participants responded to questions of how their collaborations commenced and operated, how their practices changed as a result of the collaboration, and mechanisms for universities to sustain relationships with the cultural sector.

This guide was created with the recognition that disciplines, departments, and institutions each have varying degrees of experience with collaborations with the cultural sector and industry partners. As such, this is not a book of instructions on how to forge successful collaborations, but a document sharing the findings and considerations from the Coventry Creates project. Coventry Creates was led by a multi-disciplinary group of colleagues from academia and university professional services, based across two institutions with different forms of industry experiences. Here, learning from Coventry Creates, including its benefits and challenges, are documented alongside case studies to illustrate the experiences of this programme. We hope that this approach allows you to reflect on your own practices in the specific context in which you work.

## Case Study: Mapping Women's Suffrage

**Artists:** Verity Pabla, The Pips (Band, feat. Cat Mctigue, Rio Hellyer and Shanade Morrow)

**Researcher:** Sarah Richardson, Department of History, University of Warwick

The Mapping Women's Suffrage research project aims to gather materials about Votes for Women campaigners in 1911 across England. This ongoing project displays the documents on an interactive online map, bringing together information about the campaigners with photos, details of their suffrage society and more.

Verity Pabla, musician and founder of I'm Not a Machine music licensing and production company, produced a song, Deeds, with local trio The Pips, based on the research questions and findings. The song was recorded and produced remotely.

The artists found that working with the researcher gave their work a specificity of focus. Alongside the limited time available to complete the project, this created an enjoyable challenge which enabled a concentrated working process.

Working with the artists had a significant impact on the research project. The researcher believed that Deeds would broaden the research audience and impact by engaging listeners in a contemporary application of the history research. In addition, working with the artists allowed the researcher to consider the emotional responses that had been expressed by research participants on discovering their personal and local links to the suffrage movement.

Some participants had felt angry that they hadn't learnt this information previously, while others expressed an enthusiasm to share the findings in their communities - including one young girl presenting her neighbours with a suffrage-themed PowerPoint presentation! Capturing these emotional responses is now of renewed interest to the research project.



# Benefits of Artist-Researcher Collaboration

## Thinking differently

- ▶ The requirements of collaborative art-research projects may encourage participants to build their skills in new areas of their practice and inspire innovative art and research methods. For example, some participants during Coventry Creates developed novel methods of working including digital art practices and workshop techniques.
- ▶ Researchers participating in Coventry Creates often found that collaborating with an artist allowed them to see a new element or find a new focus in their work. In several cases, artists' involvement in the projects allowed researchers to capture an emotional aspect of the project. For example, the artists' workshop techniques used for The CC helped researchers to relay affective and emotional aspects of caring and the Care Companion support tool in communications about the tool.
- ▶ Working with researchers allowed artists participating in Coventry Creates a precise focus for their work and, in some cases, a very specific audience. Some artists found the parameters of the work an engaging challenge, while others were pleased that their art formed part of a wider project.

## Personal development

- ▶ Collaborating with an artist or researcher partner developed the confidence of Coventry Creates participants with regards to their work. Ongoing dialogue between collaborators provided peer support in many cases, offering an opportunity for partnership working in disciplines which might ordinarily feel isolating. In addition, some Coventry Creates participating artists found that the focused reflection on their work allowed them to develop a deeper personal relationship and confidence with the pieces they created.
- ▶ Collaborative working can encourage the development of broad, transferable skills, as participants provide one another with mutual support. For example, participants of Coventry Creates noted that they had increased confidence in their digital communication skills, including social media and video calls, and communication to a general audience.
- ▶ The varied responsibilities carried out as part of a collaborative project contribute towards participants' career development. Coventry Creates participants, including senior academics, noted that the programme provided a space for them to explore broad working interests and consider the next steps in their careers. For early career academics, participating in the programme both increased their visibility as academics and developed transferable skills such as translation and ethical approval.

## Relationships

- ▶ Coventry Creates participants widely reported that they had formed strong working relationships, and, in some cases, friendships, with their collaborators.
- ▶ Coventry Creates inspired confidence in the members of the City of Culture University Partnership, who noted that the group had shared expectations and ambitions, and that their communication was clear and productive. This partnership had been developed over several years and had undertaken collaborative projects previously.
- ▶ While experienced positively through Coventry Creates, some artists had previously found universities difficult to engage with, and they had not interacted with universities and researchers in an art setting prior to their Coventry Creates commission. Similarly, many applicants were unknown to the funding call decision panel, including panellists with extensive experience in the Coventry cultural sector. The Coventry Creates funding call provided a focused entry point for artists to engage with researchers while also developing individual and institutional connections with the local cultural sector.

## Case Study: Reintegrate

**Artist:** Paul O'Donnell

**Researcher:** Reem Doukmak, Centre for Applied Linguistics, and Associate Fellow of the Institute of Advanced Study, University of Warwick



Reintegrate furthered the themes of Reem Doukmak's PhD research on the benefits of drama in engaging refugee communities in education and integration activities. Reem worked with theatre-maker Paul O'Donnell to create a multi-chaptered film illustrating the experiences of refugees in Coventry. The project engaged with refugees in Coventry through interviews, questionnaires, self-produced textual and visual materials, and performance, all undertaken remotely.

The impact of the project on its participants was intrinsic to its design, with workshops facilitated to gather participant stories in a comfortable environment and encourage participants to produce textual and visual materials about their experiences.

Paul and Reem presented the project during the ESRC Festival of Social Science 2020 and at a Refugee Week conference in Oxford, where they attracted the attention of a documentary maker who created a documentary about the Reintegrate project. In addition, they plan to share their project at further conferences to broaden the reach of the work, such as the September 2021 NVivo virtual conference. The Coventry Creates project helped Reem, as an early-career researcher, progress the themes of her PhD research and understand how her skills might be transferable; for example, Reem provided real-time written translation during workshops to allow participants to communicate more fluidly. The project also broadened Paul's networks and developed his relationship with the University of Warwick; Paul plans to work with researchers in future on further art-research collaborative projects.



18 PIECES OF  
RESEARCH

# Possible Challenges to Artist-Researcher Collaboration

## Clarity of Roles

▶ During collaborative art-research projects, the roles and responsibilities of the artist and researcher may be fluid and not strictly delineated. Artist-researcher collaborations take many forms; in some cases, the artist may respond to pre-existing research whereas in others the artist and researcher may co-produce a project. In some instances, there may be confusion over the collaborators' roles, with one party presenting themselves as or being perceived as the project leader. Clear communication regarding the roles and responsibilities of collaborative partners is vital in establishing efficient working relationships.

▶ Coventry Creates is a product of a partnership between the University of Warwick and Coventry University. A possible challenge of cross-institutional collaborations lies in the allocation of responsibilities; clarity should be given regarding project management and funding across institutions.

## Participant Recruitment

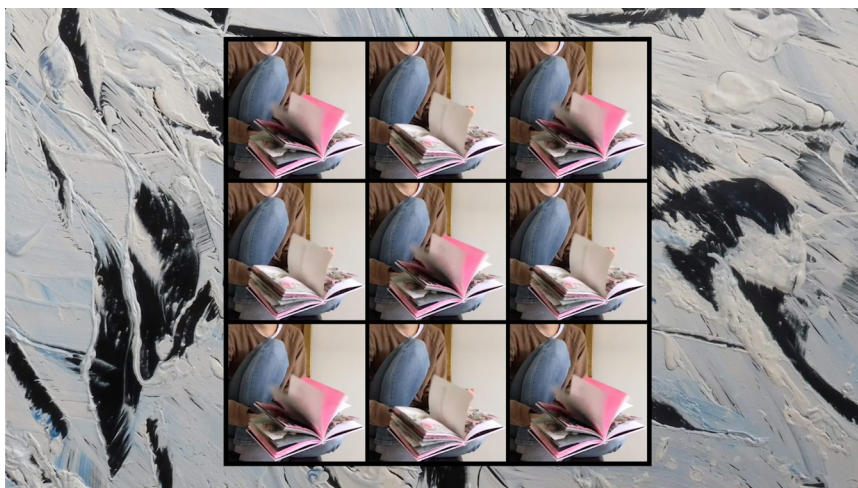
▶ When creating connections between artists and researchers to undertake collaborative projects, there may be challenges in matching project partners with similar working interests. A discursive process may be required in order to accommodate the interests of participating individuals.

▶ A long or burdensome application process may limit the accessibility of the programme, particularly for those who are freelance or casually employed workers.

## Working Practices

▶ Institutional timescales for policies, finances and ethical approval may pose delays to art-research projects, particularly with regard to payment for artists. In addition, meeting deadline commitments such as the financial year end may create an increased workload for administrators of these projects. Ease and speed of payment supports the accessibility of artist-researcher collaborations given that many artists work on a freelance basis.

▶ Reliance on individuals' processes and working connections risks the long-term stability of university partnerships and programmes.





# 18 CREATIVE RESPONSES

## Case Study: The CC

**Artist:** Lucy Hutchinson, Emily Warner

**Researcher:** Gillian Grason Smith, Chair of Carer's User Panel Nicky Thomas, and Jeremy Dale, Warwick Medical School

The Care Companion, or CC, is an online tool, freely available in Coventry and Warwickshire, which provides support to people caring for family and friends. Collaborating with artists on a Coventry Creates project, The CC, allowed the researchers to engage with the Care Companion in a new way. The artists produced a video exploring experiences of care and the support offered by the Care Companion tool.

During the project, the artists facilitated workshops with researchers and carers to understand the range of experiences faced by carers. The artists used audio-visual materials and performance to interpret experiences of care through metaphor, personal narratives, and imagery. This approach allowed the



researchers to reflect on the emotional aspects of their research on care and the ways that they could communicate the Care Companion to current and future users. The artists provided the researchers with a means to explain the Care Companion in a personal way, capturing affective experiences of how caring is felt by carers.

In addition, the researchers have been inspired to try the artists' workshop techniques in future projects. These techniques allowed them to find links between care experiences and textual and image references, which benefited the promotion of the Care Companion and the artists' and researchers' understandings of care.

# Learning and Advice from Coventry Creates

## Incentives to Participation

- ▶ Roundtable participants noted that a key incentive to participate in a collaborative art-research project was the financial investment from the participating universities. Arts funding often requires match-funding, and university investment in the local cultural sector can support greater investment in the sector in this regard, thus reinforcing the university's civic duties.
- ▶ On an individual level, artists participating in Coventry Creates projects did so during a period of financial difficulty in the cultural sector locally and nationally. Artists acknowledged that the paid commission provided financial support during the Covid-19 pandemic, while universities noted that funding individual artists in collaborative art-research projects was a mechanism through which to support the Coventry area. The University of Warwick has a commitment to working in the local West Midlands and Warwickshire regions; Coventry Creates is an example of this commitment in action.

## Matching Collaborators

- ▶ Artists and researchers are invested in exploring their areas of interest in novel and creative ways. Coventry Creates participants were sometimes surprised by the willingness and eagerness of their collaborator in engaging with their area of expertise. One artist, having seen the integration of their art into a major regional study, noted that they'd learnt, "If I was seeking to introduce research into my work, I have the capability to seek that out myself." (Sherrie Edgar, Artist)
- ▶ It can be difficult for researchers and artists to connect with one another for potential collaborations. Some challenges include identifying artists and researchers willing to collaborate, understanding partner workloads and schedules, and communicating to potential collaborators in a way that is meaningful to them.
- ▶ Several approaches to sustaining relationships between artists and researchers on an institutional level were discussed by Coventry Creates roundtable participants:
  - ▶ Maintaining individual points of contact to develop relationships between academic research and industry;
  - ▶ Facilitating information and networking sessions during which artists are welcomed to university spaces and meet people in different areas of the university;
  - ▶ Maintaining up-to-date records of artists and researchers seeking collaborative partners.
- ▶ Coventry Creates administrators provided a variety of suggestions as to how artist-researcher collaborative programmes might facilitate collaborative pairings:
  - ▶ "Speed dating" events, during which potential collaborators meet in a structured setting and consider possible collaborations;
  - ▶ Seed funding collaborators in their early stages of collaboration as they develop project ideas and deliver a small-scale output;
  - ▶ Focusing the application process on creating collaborative teams rather than on matching ideas.
  - ▶ Subject and form specialist advisors may benefit the application process in providing insight into applicants' project proposals.

## Collaborative Working

▶ Bringing together the languages of art and research disciplines which have not typically engaged with arts methods can support the translation of research to non-academic audiences. Universities can seem to have invisible force fields with researchers struggling to reach audiences from outside of these confines, but artistic collaboration is a creative approach to communicating research to different, public audiences. This approach may also be of benefit when communicating across academic disciplines.

▶ Flexibility of timelines should be considered in order to accommodate those with requirements which limit their capacity to work full-time, such as caring responsibilities and disabilities.

▶ Participants who reported having positive relationships, some even reporting friendships, with their collaborative partners often commented that communication between the partners had been open, honest, and frequent.

▶ Opportunities to network and discuss project progress between participants are valuable in building a community surrounding the collaborative programme and increasing the potential for shared learning and future collaborations.



## Case Study: Twinning

**Artist:** Gemma Foy

**Researcher:** Michael Hammond, Nicole Berríos Ortega, Centre for Education Studies, University of Warwick



Coventry was a pioneer of city twinning, and the Twinning project sought to express the history, practices, and experiences of Coventry twinning in a manner that would be accessible to a general audience, including school students. The researchers and artist collaborated to produce a short, eye-catching animation.

The researchers found that working with the artist challenged their communication skills as they edited and re-edited the film script to produce a final script that would convey the information clearly while fitting in the time available. In working with the artist, the researchers also became more aware of the ways that they could use visual communication in their research sharing to make the research more appealing and useful to audiences.



# 1 DIGITAL EXHIBITION



## Conclusion

Coventry Creates was launched in the spring of 2020, as Covid-19 and restrictions to combat the spread of the virus limited many research activities and resulted in widespread venue closures and losses of work in the cultural sector. The University of Warwick and Coventry University commissioned 18 artists to collaborate with researchers in producing short-term projects which responded to research. These projects were displayed in an online exhibition, which launched in September 2020. An evaluation of the scheme ran concurrently, with interview participants providing valuable insights into the impacts Coventry Creates had on their work.

Arts Council England awarded funding to support the second iteration of Coventry Creates, which takes place in 2021. Findings from the evaluation of the initial Coventry Creates funding call will strengthen the future development of the programme, informing the enhancement of networking and training opportunities, and the structure of the programme and administrative responsibilities.

Artist-researcher collaborations have varied impacts for participants and organisers. While such programmes may require a significant administrative effort to develop working relationships, sustain communication channels, and support financial and project management duties, they also bring a number of novel benefits. The evaluation of Coventry Creates indicated the possibilities for personal and skill development in artist-researcher collaborations, including increased levels of confidence, improvements in communication, and enhanced technical skills. In addition, researchers and artists engaged with their work in new ways, viewing research topics through new lenses, and applying novel methods to their practice.

Collaborative working between researchers and the local cultural sector can contribute to ongoing activity of universities enhancing their engagement with the civic work of higher education institutions. We hope that, in sharing our experiences of the Coventry Creates collaborative art-research programme, we have given insights which will inform and encourage your future collaborations.



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We would like to thank all artists, researchers, professional services staff, and senior academics at both the University of Warwick and Coventry University who were involved in Coventry Creates 2020. In particular, we would like to acknowledge those who participated in a roundtable discussion and contributed further knowledge sharing regarding Coventry Creates artist-researcher collaborations and ways to support university relationships with the local arts and cultural sector.

Paul O'Donnell, Theatre maker, co-founder and Producer of Shoot Festival

Verity Pabla, Singer-songwriter and founder of I'm Not A Machine music

Frances Yeung, Visual Artist and Digital Designer

Reem Doukmak, Centre for Applied Linguistics, and Associate Fellow of the Institute of Advanced Study, University of Warwick

Ryan Hughes, Founder and Artistic Director of Coventry Biennial

Katie Klaasen, Faculty of Arts Research Impact Manager, University of Warwick

Helen Wheatley, Faculty of Arts Deputy Chair, Film and Television Studies, University of Warwick

Coventry Creates 2020 received partial funding from the University of Warwick's ESRC Impact Acceleration Account ES/T502054/1 which also fully funded the evaluative research piece and this knowledge sharing document.

