

**Outset Co-directors Candida Gertler and Yana Peel speak to Margot Heller, director of the South London Gallery.**

**Margot Heller:** You obviously take a very close interest in the projects you are supporting, could you explain how you choose them? there are so many great projects and so many fantastic institutions so how do you negotiate that process of selection?

**Yana Peel:** i think certain projects speak for themselves. it was a very quick decision for us to help produce Steve McQueen's project [*Giardini*, a 40-minute long, two-channel film installation] for the Venice Biennale last year, and when we realised that the cost was out of our realm we brought in a partner to assist us. the artwork was then gifted to the British Council and the Tate. When it comes to artists we do a review and each work is considered case by case. Sometimes it's about helping an artist at a certain point in their career to enter a museum collection – with McQueen he was already in many museum collections, but eager to go to the next stage. Often we work with international artists to bring them into global collections where they might not otherwise immediately find funding. And we always come back to some of the institutions we work with, so there are ongoing relationships with South London Gallery, Camden Arts Centre and the Tate.

**Candida Gertler:** We are also very close to curators who have worked with us before, or whom we have engaged with through the project and through supporting various institutions. We're always in conversation with them, which enables us to have our finger on the pulse, and they are able to tell us about their newest projects and developments.

**YP:** there are three strands in terms of what we do. Firstly it's about acquisitions for particular institutions, as exemplified by the Outset / Frieze Art Fair Fund to benefit the Tate collection, and various other works we buy for international museums. Secondly, production is also an important area for us, and we work with galleries and artists to create works that then get gifted to collections. Lastly it's about working with institutions, whether they are of a large or a small scale, whether they're in London or abroad, in order to facilitate exhibitions and education projects. So we review proposals along those three strands, and then along with our team we make decisions about the allocation of our patrons' funding.

**CG:** art is exciting and we have to show the various directions, the various faces that it has nowadays, even collaborations that reach out into other areas such as dance. We've had a few very successful collaborations such as Wayne McGregor and Julian Opie at the Royal Opera House, or FOS – Thomas Poulsen, a Danish artist – and Hofesh Schechter at Sadler's Wells. There are a lot of possibilities in exploring contemporary art, in showing its variety and excitement and not letting it become stale, and that's also guiding us in how we engage with the artists and in the projects we choose.

**YP:** We're increasingly seeing proposals now that take the visual arts as their core, but which also engage with the world of fashion, with the world of dance, with the world of design. I think that artists find it exciting to discover those places in-between, and we can facilitate that and enable artists to see their visions out.

**MH:** How do you see Outset developing in the future? How can you maintain the integrity of your organisation and at the same time expand to meet the growing need for funding in the face of the cuts currently facing the arts?

**YP:** I think that in the new environment it's our responsibility to continue to try to engage new members, as well as existing ones, in the absence of tax incentives or government funding. So in terms of what we're looking to do, it's not to roll over and wait for a new era to come—we need to stay upbeat and continue to offer people the experiences that the arts bring to us, the benefits that are well beyond the financial. We saw a quote this morning that said, "the business of art is the production of civilisation." We feel that we just have to keep going and continue to bring the best of the arts to our patrons, and to people that might not otherwise go out and find it themselves.

**CG:** We are also very lucky that our patrons are extremely visionary and have really embraced the arts, sometimes individually growing their involvement to the point where they have become trustees in institutions, or set up their own groups, and are now essential in supporting the arts internationally.

**MH:** With regard to the current cuts to art funding, can you comment on the situation and how it might play out in the future?

**YP:** Well, we very much hope that the government will maintain its commitment to funding the institutions that bring so much to the cultural landscape. And while we don't want to take any public funding because we don't want to cannibalise the efforts of the institutions we directly help, we are very focused on innovative and new partnerships. We had a wonderful collaboration with the Art Fund that enabled us to produce McQueen's work for Venice last year, and we will continue to seek out partnerships that enable us to multiply the effects of what we do across the regions. We hope the government will see that it is integral to keep private and public funding working hand-in-hand.

**MH:** One of the most important things about South London Gallery is the bringing together of quite diverse audiences: students from the college, residents from the housing estate and pupils from local schools, as well as artists, curators and patrons. At Outset you're negotiating a path between public and private, and I thought it was wonderful that you encouraged Mont Blanc to host its award ceremony here in Peckham, at Hannah Barry's *Bold Tendencies* exhibition on the roof of a car park. Is the bringing together of different audiences something that you particularly enjoy doing?

**CG:** Yes it's absolutely an integral part of what Outset is doing. It's by mixing different experiences and different locations, by bringing people outside of what they normally do, that we can continue doing what we do and supporting the areas we are able to support. But it is also the directors of spaces like South London Gallery, like

the Whitechapel Gallery, like Camden arts Centre, who against all odds have managed to produce incredible spaces that are such an addition to their communities, and I think that is something our patrons are very sensitive to. It is about development, it is something that wouldn't have happened without us stepping in, and that gives us the biggest return for our activities and a real feeling of achievement.

**YP:** We are also very privileged to be as comfortable in the world of art as we are in the world of business. We have the benefit of knowing both audiences, and being in this position enables us to bring people together. We find magic in collaborations between artists and dancers, artists and fashion designers, artists and musicians, but also between people in finance and independent curators – people who might not find a common dialogue otherwise. Somehow we hope that we can give them a common area of interest within the community.

### **10 projects supported by Outset Contemporary art Fund**

**2003** the foundation of the Outset / Frieze Art Fair Fund to benefit the Tate, the world's first acquisitions fund connected to an art fair. Over the years works by artists including Alice Channer, Thomas Hirschhorn (see page 49) and Artur Zmijewski have been acquired for the national collection.

**2004** the opening of the Outset Garden at the Camden arts Centre, a calm outdoor space for artists to work in. Outset also supports the residency programme, which has hosted artists including Alexandre de Cunha, Assefa Gebrekidan and Francis Upritchard.

**2007** The installation of American artist Paul Pfeiffer's *The Saints* at Wembley Stadium, home of the England football team. A constellation of hidden speakers played chants echoing the absent spectacle of the 1966 World Cup final, accompanied by video projections of a crowd of young Filipinos cheering on the phantom players.

**2008** The production of Argentine artist Thomas Saraceno's *Air Port City* for the Hayward Gallery's group exhibition *Psycho Buildings*. "Up in the sky there will be this cloud," says Saraceno. "a habitable platform that floats in the air, changing form and merging with other platforms just as clouds do."  
the production of Brazilian artist Rivane Neuenschwander's solo exhibition *Suspension Point* at South London Gallery. She transformed the space with a monumental site-specific installation involving the temporary construction of a whole new floor within the gallery.

**2009** the inauguration of the Outset acquisition Fund for London's Royal College of Art – an annual £10,000 fund for the purchase of works from graduating students and the Outset Prize studio bursary. In 2009 works were bought from Nathan Barlex (see page 22), Robin Footitt (see page 16) and Caroline Walker; the prize was awarded to Lucy Moore.  
the production of British artist Steve McQueen's *Giardini* (see page 166), a film commission for the British Pavilion at the 53rd Venice Biennale.

**2010** Outset Munich funded the production of works by Steven Claydon for the group exhibition *Golden Times* at Haus der Kunst. His sculpture *The World Alighted* (see page 12) was subsequently given to the city's Pinakothek der Moderne.

Outset Israel funded Israeli artist Karen Russo's project *Meditation on a Triangle* – comprising a film and three related sculptures by Shezad Dawood, Jeremy Millar and Mark Titchner – for her solo show at CCA, Tel Aviv.

Outset Outside supports cross-disciplinary projects, such as a recent collaboration between FOS (Thomas Poulsen, a Danish artist) and Hofesh Schechter at Sadler's Wells theatre, London.

the construction of the Outset artist's Flat at the South London Gallery. the gallery's ambitious expansion project involved expanding into the derelict terraced house next door to provide three new exhibition spaces, a café and a flat for visiting artists participating in the residency programme.

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