

## Pioneering Fine Art Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) Project update – development and progress



In January 2010, **Acme Studios** and **Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, University of the Arts London**, were awarded funding to embark on a two-year Knowledge Transfer Partnership to enable discussions about the role and form of the artist's studio to be explored in greater depth.

KTPs are part government-funded programmes which help businesses to improve their competitiveness and productivity through the better use of the knowledge, technology and skills that are available within the UK knowledge base. This is the first time fine art has been the subject of a KTP.

The project is being undertaken by **Dr Arantxa Echarte**, an artist and academic, who was appointed in July 2010. As Artists' Studios Research and Development Associate she is based at Acme full time, supported by Acme Chief Executive Jonathan Harvey and Graham Ellard for Double Agents, the research project based at Central Saint Martins which he leads with Professor Anne Tallentire.

*Above left: Jonathan Baldock at the Fire Station.  
Above right: Clare Qualmann at Robinson Road.  
Photographs: Hugo Glendinning (2011)*

The initial stages of the project saw Arantxa undertaking a series of research activities including reviewing Acme's charitable purposes, mission and operations; detailed desk-based research into the profile of current artist tenants; visiting a range of studio providers throughout the UK, and carrying out an extensive literature review. More recently, contextual research has identified a range of 'critical factors' that characterise the studio's role and function and this has fed into the selection of a representative range of artist tenants for formal recorded interviews, covering Acme's London buildings, both converted and new-build. The selection was based on objective factors such as an artist's age, size of studio and distance from home, and more practice-related factors including the nature of the work and the materials, processes and technologies employed.

Artists completed a questionnaire prior to the interviews, which were divided into three sections covering career, practice and their studio use. Thirty-one interviews have now been completed. Undertaken as 'oral history' interviews they focus not only on the role and function of the studio for each artist, but importantly capture more general contextual information associated with each artist's life and the development of their practice, and the parallel history of the use of studio space.

Alongside the interviews a series of specially commissioned photographs by Hugo Glendinning portray the artists and their studios; views and details of the studios as specific types of spaces and of the artists in action.

The recorded interviews and photographic essay will not only provide critical research material for the project but, importantly, also constitute an important permanent resource for future study.

Artists interviewed and photographed are as follows:

**Chris Aldgate, Jonathan Baldock, Russell Burn, Cesar Cornejo, Neville Gabie, Amy Gee, Dryden Goodwin, Jane Goodwin, Jon Hicks, Jochen Holz, John Hooper, Eryka Isaak, Samson Kambalu, Rob Kessler, Franco La Russa, David Lock, Robin Mason, Gareth Mason,**

**Kitty McLaughlin, Brigid McLeer, Kathy Prendergast, Clare Price, Clare Qualmann, Fiona Rae, Fernando Palma Rodriguez, Yukako Shibata, Paul St. George, Rebecca Stevenson, Isa Suarez, Poppy Whatmore and Anthony Whishaw**

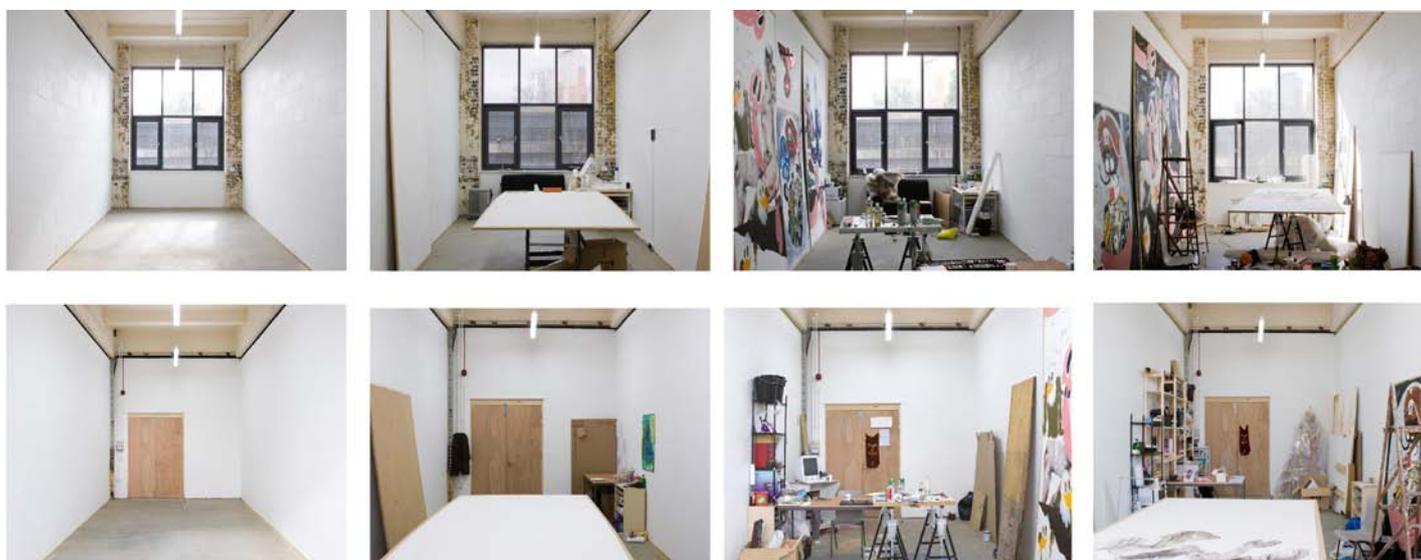
### Studio documentation

In parallel with the interviews and photographic essay we have commissioned photographer Moz Bulbeck to document a series of 11 near-identical studios which form part of a development of 30 newly-converted spaces at our Childers Street building in Deptford, SE8. Recorded in October last year the initial images are of the empty studios taken from fixed viewpoints.

Moz has now returned three times to photograph the studios, maintaining the same viewpoints, to document the transformation of the spaces as the artists move in and begin to arrange and establish their working practices. A final shoot will take place in March next year.

The resulting images will provide a unique and objective record of how artists, representing a wide range of practices, respond differently to the use of near-identical spaces.

*Below: Studio 80 at Childers Street studios.  
Photograph: Moz Bulbeck (2010-2011)*



## Developing a partnership with Central Saint Martins

A series of seminars run by Graham and Arantxa with BA Fine Art students have provided an overview of the project, the activities of Acme Studios and the affordable studio provision sector in general. These have prompted and facilitated discussions, eliciting and cross-examining the students' perceived priorities in terms of studio provision. The seminars have proved valuable in drawing the project's initial findings or research questions into the curriculum and, in return, the project has gained from the students' responses. Feedback from students has been very positive, and the insight the seminars have presented of professional practice after college has been acknowledged as very valuable. Sessions have followed with MA Fine Art students, articulating and examining their expectations and priorities regarding their perceived studio needs on graduation.

Most recently we collaborated with the BA Architecture: Spaces and Objects on a project

*Below: Christy Symington at Childers Street studios.  
Photograph: Oscar Brito (2011)*



with final year students. For this project BA and MA Fine Art students acted as 'clients' in a hypothetical commission to design a new studio space. The project involved architecture students visiting artists' studios in Childers Street (a converted ex-industrial building) and Leven Road (new purpose-built studios). Artists visited were Tete Alencar, Jack Duplock, Eleanor Moreton and Christy Symington. The artists then visited Central Saint Martins to be part of a project follow-up seminar.

Both Central Saint Martins and Acme intend that this creative dialogue between the two organisations will continue and will lead to future partnerships.

### Dissemination

The project was presented at the Knowledge Exchange discussion (organised by A New Direction in KTP partnership with Birkbeck University) at A New Direction's Thinking Room in London in July 2011 (<http://thinking-room.org/gallery/>).

The project was also presented at the Future Space event organised by the National Federation of Artists' Studio Providers (December 2010), at a research symposium convened by Sheffield Hallam University, at Royal Holloway, University of London (March 2011) and at the International Art Professionals Summer School in Brussels (July 2011).

The project has been featured in several publications such as the Institute of Knowledge Transfer 'Exchange' publication (Spring/Summer 2011, p.12), 'Arts Professional' publication (Issue 237, p. 23) and 'Halo', The Central Saint Martins magazine for business (Issue 9, pp. 14-15).

Additionally the project will be included in the latest issue of the 'Creative Partnerships: Intersections between the arts, culture and other sectors' IFACCA (International Federation of Arts Councils and Cultural Agencies) 2011 report.

## Future developments

Sustaining affordable, high-quality and appropriate studio provision in London in what is likely to become an increasingly challenging economic environment for artists and arts organisations alike, will leave little margin for error. Our future (and current) programmes and developments will benefit enormously from research to provide a better and more in-depth understanding of our beneficiaries' needs. The KTP therefore is particularly important for us at a time when a number of new capital projects are in development in addition to the permanent new-build studios opening this year – 49 studios at Matchmakers Wharf, Homerton, E9 and 27 studios at Warton House on Stratford High Street, E15.

Currently Acme is working with architecture practice HAT Projects and High House Production Park Limited on the design development of 40 affordable artists' studios, the next phase of the High House Production Park development in Purfleet, Essex. The £2m project, developed in a partnership by HHPP and Acme Studios, will create over 40 affordable artists' studios and work-live units, including project spaces for large-scale making and public showing of work. It will form part of a growing campus which includes the Royal Opera House Production Workshop and the National Skills Academy for Creative and Cultural Skills, as well as the restored listed buildings and gardens of High House itself.

Already the emerging findings from the KTP are proving invaluable in helping to achieve a detailed client brief for this pioneering new project in the Thames Gateway, the development of a standalone studio building.

The next stage of the KTP will be an analysis and summary of the research, particularly the interviews, and the drawing out of identifiable patterns, overlaps and shared views. These findings will then be applied to the development of user briefs which will cover a number of different studio types and development models, with the ultimate objective of extending and improving Acme's studio provision. These will go beyond a simple review of Acme's standard studio design and performance specification and include, for example, the development of purpose-designed studios for recent graduates at accessible rents.

These user briefs will be trialled with the Acme staff team and invited specialists, including an architectural practice, as hypothetical buildings, to explore and test their assumptions and viability.

For more information about this KTP project please contact:

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