

Benefiting communities and developing artists' careers

The project

An artist residency in collaboration with Southwark Council and South London Gallery based at Acme's Galleria studios in Peckham, SE15. Open to visual artists living in the London Borough of Southwark, the 18 month residency includes a rent free studio (345 sq.ft. / 32 m²) and £10,000 cash bursary in fixed instalments.



Salon facilitated by Ana Laura Lopez de le Torre, 2008.

Residency aims and objectives

- To promote the arts and to reach communities within Southwark, which to some extent are marginalised or perceived as hard to reach and would otherwise not normally have access to creative activity.
- To provide space and time for the selected artist to develop their own practice.

Background

In January 2006, Acme Studios opened a new-build studio complex at The Galleria in Pennack Road, Peckham, London SE15, providing 50 affordable and permanent studios for artists. The studios form part of a larger mixed-use scheme, including private and affordable residential apartments, developed in partnership with Barratt Homes.

On completion of the development, Acme set up a residency opportunity for a professional artist in order to illustrate how Acme could benefit the communities in which new studios are located and simultaneously provide an artist with a major professional development opportunity.

Aims and objectives for the residency were identified in partnership with the London Borough of Southwark and the South London Gallery. In the context of a block of studios in the midst of a residential development in Southwark, the partners agreed that the residency should be targeted at artists with an interest in socially engaged practice.

Resources

Acme provides the studio for 18 months free of charge, makes a cash contribution to the bursary element and takes responsibility for managing the residency and providing staff, administration and other resources. Southwark arts and cultural services team allocate £5,000 towards the bursary element of the residency as well as staff resources. The South London Gallery offer professional development support to the artist through studio visits by the senior curator and support from other gallery staff.

Public engagement

Two artists to have taken part in the residency to date: Isa Suarez (2006-2007) and Ana Laura Lopez de la Torre (2008-2009). Both artists have successfully provided creative opportunities for a wide range of individuals from across Southwark. Isa's residency culminated in a public march through the streets of Peckham and Camberwell and so far over 200 people have been involved in Ana Laura's varied programme of workshops, walks and talks.



The March of the Human Rights Jukebox, Isa Suarez, 2007

"I was given total freedom in the time I held the residency to do what I wished with whomever I wished. Acme were so present, so active, in encouraging me to pursue my ideas and finding means by which this could be done, no matter what the circumstances."

Isa Suarez, Acme Southwark Studio Residency (2006 – 2007)

Professional development

The residency bursary gives the artist financial breathing space, without imposing any demands for an end product. By committing more time to their work, artists are able to develop their practice in new ways. Artists' also benefit from the mentoring by South London Gallery curators and other gallery staff, as well as the support from Acme and Southwark staff.

Evaluation

Following the first artist in residence programme, Acme commissioned an evaluation report written by Holly Tebbutt, an independent visual arts consultant. The in-depth report concluded that the residency programme, 'demonstrated that a professional artist with an interest in socially engaged practice can offer a number of creative possibilities for public involvement with the professional arts to non-specialists from all walks of life.' A full copy of the report is available from Acme or online at www.acme.org.uk/publications.

The future

Building on the success of the programme in Southwark, Acme launched a new residency in Tower Hamlets, at its new-build complex of 21 accessible studios at Leven Road, Poplar, E14. The two-year programme is open to all artists in London and includes a rent free studio and £10,000 per year bursary. Jan Hendrickse, a sound artist from London, has been chosen as the first Acme Tower Hamlets Studio Residency artist and began the residency in March 2009.

If you are interested in finding out more about Acme's artist residencies or other award and community programmes, please contact:

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