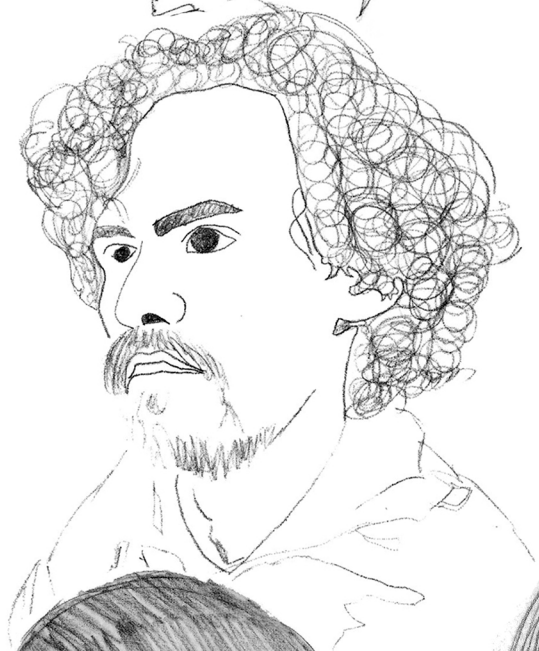


ART STRINGS

11 artists talk about
what they do and why



W

hen people asked me as a child, what I wanted to be when I grew up, I would pull out the five fingers: “On Monday, a ballerina; Tuesday, a doctor; Wednesday, a fireman; Thursday, a writer; Friday, a lawyer.”

I didn’t land too far off; I work as an artist. This is perhaps one of the most flexible professions that exist – self defined and conducive to facilitating the plural. Specifically speaking, I am a performance maker; sometimes I am onstage, sometimes off. I dramaturg (which is like a content consultant to a director, looking at logic and detail), I produce and I direct. I am also a photographer, sometimes this overlaps with performance, sometimes it doesn’t. There are periods when I am literally working on a different job every day. I love that.

After my time at UWCSEA, I went straight to drama school. I graduated from the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama in London with a degree in Theatre Practice: Performance Arts. I then moved to Swaziland to produce a music festival called MTN BUSHFIRE. Whilst working, I lived on the UWC Waterford Kamhlaba campus. Having an arm exposed to an academic setting is very important to me because it is in the academic world that explorations and processes are fixed through articulation. The tangibility of that is attractive as I work with the ephemeral. Afterwards, I moved back to London and worked as a freelance photographer, ran National Art Service with Alan Fielden and made other performances outside of this that allowed me to tour internationally. I am currently based in Singapore, taking commissions and performing in a show called ROOM.

There isn’t a singular avenue for an artist to move through, there is no formula. You can go into higher education and specialise in your art, or you can major in something else and still hone your craft on the side. You don’t have to go into higher education; you can take a job right away or be an apprentice. You can “have a backup first” (common advice from the folks) and focus on your art after your law or economics degree. There is no right or wrong way to play this game. What you must be aware of is that you need time and practice to hone your craft. It is also a people business, so communities and networks are important. Artists are some of the most engaged, intelligent and beautiful people I know. Their senses are always switched on and the community is rich in diversity, thought and life.

I see my function here, at your Careers Fair, as one to dispel the myths surrounding “the artist”. It is a job; it serves a function, just like engineering or biochemistry. Artists are inventors. You drive your own journey through the profession. I think successful artists recognise that the profession gives them a license to experiment and access absolutely anything they’re interested in. You can use your medium to explore quantum physics, Russian history, the application of behaviour economics in the British government, the world is your oyster. With this freedom also comes responsibility; you are directly accountable for your own decisions, and your movements. It’s not ‘safe’. It is challenging to invent. But one must lose sight of the shore to discover new lands.

I thought about traits that artists have. You know, like, to be an economist, you have to be good at math. I arrived at these words: curious, empathetic, critical, reflective, passionate, disciplined, rigorous, insatiable... how do you know if you are these things? Can you know these things in the same way you know you are good at math?

What follows this introduction is a series of eleven specially conducted interviews with artists from a variety of disciplines – there are a couple of writers, a puppeteer, a musician, theatre makers, performers, fine artists. They are colleagues and collaborators of mine that I have utmost respect for. I ask them about what they do, why they do it and how. They have all been given the same set of questions, but their answers differ drastically. The responses tread the spectrum of pragmatism and idealism. Each person has a very individual measure of success and every one is at a different point in their trajectory.

I think what underpins it all is an awareness that life is short, so if we're going to make a decision about how we live, how we spend our time, we're going to choose something that brings us joy.

– Jemima Yong
UWCSEA Alumni
Class of 2008
East Malaysia

MALACHY OROZCO

USA/IRELAND

"IF AT ANY TIME YOU FIND YOURSELF IN ANY SITUATION WHERE YOU ARE NEITHER LEARNING NOR CONTRIBUTING, USE YOUR TWO FEET TO TAKE YOURSELF WHERE YOUR TIME WILL BE BETTER SPENT – ONLY YOU KNOW WHERE THIS IS."

The most astute description of Malachy I've heard is that he is a Theatrical Swiss Army Knife. He is a professional actor, musician, lighting designer and production technician. The breadth of his knowledge is awe-inspiring. Mal was previously based in New York and now lives in London. - JY

If you were representing your trade at this fair, what would your title be?

I am a creative entrepreneur masquerading as a theatre artist. I work mainly in theatre, but what I try to do – what makes me most happy – is facilitating collaborative projects between organisations that don't normally work with each other.

Why do you make your art? What is it that drives you?

The things that I create are sometimes the result of something that "disrupts" me, that is, something that interrupts what I would call my "average of mood". I play music, and I write words, and I also work with lighting, sound, and a/v technology. These "disruptions" take place in many forms, and they are often repetitive: a melody I can't stop humming, a phrase I can't get out of mind, an image from a dream I had.

What drives me, why I make art, is an effort to rid my internal being of these disruptions. The most direct method of expulsion has been to make real, or "manifest", these "disruptions": I write a song or dabble on my computer; I write the phrase down, or type into my phone; I record my dreams, which may become scenes of a story I might write, or the basis of a song. How these disruptions arrive in my mind, I'll never really know, but each time I admit them into the world, I grow a little more, or learn from the process of trying to manifest them as accurately as possible – much like a volcano will erupt from within, but the overall mountain will grow larger. A subsection of my drive is just the question: Can I do that? That question leads to interesting places.

How do you pay your rent and other living expenses?

I consider theatre my art, including all its elements, so I would say that I work full-time in my art.

I freelance as a theatre technician, doing lighting and sound, for several different venues that are within walking distance from my home. This keeps my travel cost low. These venues also have refrigerators on-site, so I often buy ingredients and store them there, which means I can eat for the week pretty cheaply. I've stopped drinking alcohol, mostly, as it's very expensive at private establishments. If I'm going out to a bar, I'll order a soft drink. Sometimes I get wine as a 'thank you' for working on shows, which is always nice.

Are you in education?

What is the relationship between making art and academia?

After high school, I went immediately into an American liberal arts state university, where I majored in theatre. Liberal arts schools in the States are not conservatoires / conservatories, so it was not an arts school. I studied alongside business majors, mathematicians, chemists: all sorts.

The relationship between making art and academia is an interesting one, and varies from institution to institution.

If you think of art as a technology, it is subject to similar influences of the advances in tech (certain methods may be rendered obsolete or out dated by the emergence of a new one), similar sways of fashion, similar growing and shrinking pools of funding.

When I was at university, we had a guest artist, Tim Miller, come and do a workshop with us. It was the first exposure that any of us had to making work that was based on ourselves. Until that point, we had only put on plays that were written by major playwrights. It was a revelation that we could be the source of our own expression. I immediately looked up to this man, and he remarked that "every university is its own fiefdom", its own petty kingdom. At my university, few professors worked professionally outside of the academic sphere, which meant that their methods, as incisive as they might be, were no longer cutting edge. The students were also employed as material for some of the professors to utilise in their artistic experiments. Few graduates made the jump to the nearest big city to pursue a career, and even fewer stayed on in the arts in any capacity, that particular university environment having depleted their artistic energy in a few short years.

However, there are other institutions that are very much cutting edge, the graduates of which may be able to join a network of other graduates. These institutions tend to foster the individual expression of the student, in order that they might thrive in whatever environment they're placed.

What have you experienced as a challenge/frustration to your practice?

I'm not frustrated, I don't think. I feel pretty okay about what I do. My family's been very supportive, and money's been okay of late. I've avoided exposure for the most part, choosing to have friends and live a life instead.

I suppose I wish I could do more for those around me. That's the hardest thing – when I'm doing okay, and a friend isn't, and there isn't much that I can do in terms of direct financial support.

What's the difference between a child and an artist?

Ha, I don't know what the difference is. I don't have children, and I don't spend much time around them. I heard one man give a talk about the four phases of musicianship: Unconscious Unknowing, Conscious Unknowing, Conscious Knowing, and Conscious Unknowing – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Rhvxy0r2Do>. In this video, he refers to the four states of artistic development that divide the Child and the Artist. It's a great study from someone who I, personally, believe.

So you're saying can anyone work as an artist?

Art is about life enrichment – it makes everything better, more interesting. Even business is an art, if that's how you want to look at it.

What traits do you think good artists have?

My favourite artists marginally exist in "the real world". They're not afraid to use themselves, their own life experiences, as a jumping off point for their creative work. They often use dreams, as well. And they're not dead. I think that's really important for me – to look up to the artists that are still alive, and are still making work: where I'm from, there are many young, dead celebrities that are hailed as examples of "great artists". Real artists, like real athletes and real human beings – they have up periods, and down periods, and they stick it out. That's the most important trait, to me, of a good artist: Perseverance, without bitterness.

Who are some artists that you find inspiring?

My favourite artists are the sci-fi novelist William Gibson, the musician Elliott Smith, the radio producer Joe Frank.

Tell me a story

Recently, I was at this event called Devoted & Disgruntled, where the organiser gave a set of principles for us to follow over the course of the weekend. They were:

Whoever comes are the right people.

Wherever it happens is the right place.

Whatever happens is the only thing that could have.

Whenever it starts is the right time.

When it is over, it is over.

THE ONE LAW of OPEN SPACE is THE LAW OF TWO FEET or THE LAW OF MOBILITY:
If at any time you find yourself in any situation where you are neither learning nor contributing use your two feet to take yourself where your time will be better spent – only you know where this is.

What this suggested to me was that, no matter what, in life, I'm always going to miss something. I'm never going to be there for everything, but I will be there for some things. And my resignation that I'll see what I'll see has helped me to relax a great deal since the beginning of this year.

Who do you socialise with? Are all your friends artists too? How do you meet new people?

I socialise with friends that I work with, and I use art like some people use sport: as a way of interacting with people in a non-conversational way.

Some of my friends are not artists – some are teachers, some are business administrators. Most are artists, though.

I meet new people mostly through art-related projects, and by going to art-related events: shows, parties, music gigs, comedy events, events that I'm working as a technician. I haven't found a free Monday yet, but one of these Mondays, I'll get down to the Latin dancing night at a local Cuban bar. I've always wanted to learn, but I've never made the time.

RUTH VOON UK

“WHEN I TOLD MY CAREERS TEACHER AT SCHOOL I WANTED TO TRAIN TO BE A DANCER AT 16, SHE LOOKED AT ME AND SAID SHE COULD TELL THAT I WOULD NEVER BE A DANCER. WELL SHE WAS VERY WRONG...”

Ruth works in London and often tours nationally and internationally. Amongst others, she has worked with Shobana Jeyasingh Dance, Will Tuckett, Fin Walker, Art of Spectra (Sweden), Union Dance, Royal Opera House, English National Opera and ATMA Dance. I love watching Ruth perform, it makes my skin feel prickly. - JY

If you were representing your trade at this fair, what would your title be?

Contemporary (modern) Dancer predominantly working with dance companies and choreographers to create new pieces of work, usually from a task based approach, and then performing and touring it.

I occasionally teach dance whether in relation to choreography or my own approach/movement style.

I also work as a rehearsal director: rehearsing a dance piece so movement is clear and dancers understand/remember the idea behind the movement – its intention, the concept, what they are trying to convey i.e. to go back to the task that generated the movement phrase. This also involves managing a group and group dynamics, resolving issues, people management and elements of scheduling and organising. Being responsible for the group and a go-between, liaising between dancers and management.

Why do you make your art? What is it that drives you?

For the sense of freedom it gives – the freedom to be myself and to express myself in a way that feels authentic.

How do you pay your rent and other living expenses?

At a certain point I started working full time and since then I've been very lucky to work consistently and regularly which means my art is supporting me to pay the bills. Now and then I have done other jobs to earn money but pretty infrequently

compared to some dancers. This has meant being super organised and looking for the next job in advance because they are usually short projects of the duration of a few months. I would be researching, auditioning or contacting people, networking 24/7 whilst working. At times projects have followed on one from the other and at other times I might have a gap of 2 weeks (on average) in between. Because the work is so physically and mentally demanding, I usually use my earnings to support myself during the gap and just take it as downtime/recovery time before starting the next one. Where gaps have been longer (particularly at seasonal times such as Christmas) I might claim unemployment benefit from the state which is really a token weekly sum (c. £70) to help live while I rest. I feel happy to do this because I pay my taxes and whilst the amount I earn is enough to live on, it's not enough to save money for the in-between time.

I have also taken non dance jobs e.g. commercial jobs such as modelling or acting in a commercial which can pay quite good money though I've only gotten into this very recently. The work is incidental, usually you have to go to castings which is like an actor's audition. Besides how you respond, they also choose people according to their look and if it fits the image of how the company wants to be seen. Work is very last minute so it's a good filler if I have free time.

I have worked as manager of a dance studio (similar to an office manager) looking after bookings, enquiries, book keeping, contracting, liaising, fundraising, marketing and publicity, as well as project management – a bit of an all round job of managing a company but usually done between 2 people, so a lot of work for the amount of time there is. Usually this kind of work, or any role specialising in a particular area of this, is part time and freelance so I combine it with other work. I have also worked for companies specialising in a particular area such as fundraising or general administration. Once in a blue moon I might work as an office temp with the skills I have.

Are you in education?

What is the relationship between making art and academia?

I'm currently studying for a massage qualification as a potential career shift post performing which is currently my main source of income.

I started training as a dancer from 16 years old, entering full time dance foundation course for 2 years. I then went on to complete a 3 year Bachelor of Performing Arts (Dance) degree in a specialist dance school in England, Northern School of Contemporary Dance.

I want to say the relationship between making art and academia is about learning tools to help you in what you do but I would say that has been more about the many CPD (continuous professional development) training I have done independently. My academic training was focused on the technical aspect as the tools to physically do but did not incorporate the creative or mental aspects of the job.

In your opinion, how long have you been an artist for and where have you worked in this time?

I remember taking part in some school performances as an untrained dancer so I would say that was the start of my being an artist as it was a way to communicate and perform. Professionally, it took me nearly 3 years out after graduating – an unintentional choice as I got into arts administration/management as a way to earn money and was very successful. I stopped to reflect and realised that this was a path I could come back to at anytime but that my performing career has a shelf life and needed to be my priority. After that I started working on independent projects on a freelance basis whilst still working in an office part time until I entered a company full time, so I would say 2001 was when I started working as an independent artist.

Work has mainly been UK based for me although I have also been involved in projects in Sweden and Spain. Touring with UK companies has been international.

What have you experienced as a challenge/frustration to your practice?

- The lack of communication, feedback and honesty so that there are opportunities to resolve things, grow, develop, negotiate rather than it just working in favour of the choreographer/company.
- Opportunities for dancers to grow and develop on a job rather than just giving – for work to feed us too
- Lack of loyalty to the dancers when we get paid relatively little for what we do.
- Having to fight for small things with management that mean a lot to us in terms of being respected and treated decently – e.g. being paid per diems when we arrive back past dinner time on a travel day, being paid for a travel day since other work is unlikely to be able to be combined as half of the day is gone travelling.
- Consideration of hours worked especially consecutive days, issues regarding scheduling to enable enough rest time. Performing on travel days where journeys are in excess of 2.5 hours (specifically for dancers as it has an affect on us physically which is our tool)
- Freelance rates not reflecting lack of pension contributions, healthcare/sick pay that is the right of employed persons
- Many times people are not willing to negotiate about small clashes of time/time needed to audition for the next job, therefore its been necessary to pull 'sickies' in order to look after oneself
- Preconceptions of more mature dancers (i.e. post 35 years)

- Some opportunities (awards, scholarships) being age restricted in favour of under 30's
- My dad was initially worried that I wouldn't get cast in major roles because his only comparison was the status quo of ballet companies back then. However contemporary companies don't typically operate with the same hierarchy so it wasn't an issue. And also the climate has really changed and the cultural make up a lot more diverse

What's the difference between a child and an artist? Can anyone work as an artist?

I think anyone can be an artist irrespective of age, it's about trying to communicate through your medium

What traits do you think good artists have?

Determination, perseverance, discipline

Who are some artists that you find inspiring?

Ohad Naharin & Sylvie Guillem

Tell me a story

When I told my careers teacher at school I wanted to train to be a dancer at 16, she looked at me and said she could tell that I would never be a dancer. Well she was very wrong and that's why perseverance and determination is key.

In the same school I choreographed a solo performance to a song I loved and I remember flying through the air and feeling this sense of freedom I had not felt in any other way.

Who do you socialise with? Are all your friends artists too? How do you meet new people?

Not all my friends are artists, I personally enjoy mixing with other people but it is challenging meeting other people as I chose to put my work first which meant my life centred around choices related to my career in terms of how I would spend my free time and I think it is only through other interests that you meet people outside of your art. Nowadays as I move in a slightly different circle, develop other interests, I am starting to meet people of different walks of life.

SOPHIE GRODIN

DENMARK

“FOR ME MAKING ART AND ACADEMIA ARE CLOSELY LINKED – THE DISCUSSION THAT TAKES PLACE AROUND MAKING WORK, AND AFTER HAVING SHOWN THE WORK TO THE PUBLIC, ALL SERVE TO THE DISCOURSE OF PERFORMANCE MAKING.”

Sophie was my junior at university. I was in my last year when she was in her first. We collaborated on a live tattooing project with Irish performance maker Sian Ni Mhuiri. We sat on a bench by a roundabout after one rehearsal and talked for a very long time. Sophie is currently working with Karen Christopher (a member of the seminal Chicago based performance company Goat Island), they are about to begin presenting their second duet Miles and Miles. - JY

If you were representing your trade at this fair, what would your title be?

PERFORMANCE MAKER – I make collaborative performance that that looks at the details and patterns within and around us that we don't normally notice.

Why do you make your art? What is it that drives you?

I make art to create a space to pay attention. I make art to make us stop for a moment, to notice ourselves and what's around us, to ask questions, to travel away in our mind, to play, to interact in ways we wouldn't normally do, to move faster than we've ever done, to not understand anything at all and to understand everything at the same time.

How do you pay for your rent and other living expenses?

I'm paid for my performance work which makes up over half of my income at this moment. I'm paid project by project, so one could say I work freelance. Other than that I babysit a lovely child and work a couple of nights in a pub which is a nice 'brain get-away'.

Are you in education?

What is the relationship between making art and academia?

I'm not currently in education. After high school I worked to save up money to travel. I then went travelling for 5 months in Argentina and Brazil. 3 months I lived in Buenos Aires where I met amazing and inspiring people who were theatre makers. This encounter ultimately let me to apply to theatre school in London. I graduated from Royal Central School of Speech and Drama in 2013, and have worked in the arts since. For me making art and academia are closely linked – the discussion that takes place around making work, and after having shown the work to the public, all serve to the discourse of performance making. When making my work, a lot of research is used – many of which are academic sources and not necessarily arts related. It can be anything from Sociology, Biology, Neurology to historical sources.

There's a lot of writing happening too – a way of documenting and sharing of the thoughts and considerations and findings that happen in the process.

In your opinion, how long have you been an artist for and where have you worked in this time?

I have been an artist for 3 years – since my second year of university. I have worked for many artists and groups in that time – including Coney, Rajni Shah, Nigel and Louise, Karen Christopher – who's my collaborator, as well as the 'collective' I'm part of called ROOM which consists of 4 other artists and myself.

JAMES MURRAY-PERTON UK

**"I OFTEN FIND SONGWRITING FRUSTRATING
BUT FOR SOME REASON, I STILL KEEP DOING IT."**

James is singer and guitarist with London based band Happy Mammoth. He has recently stopped working at his full time office job to focus on making and teaching music. I have worked with Jim as an actor and have been a long time supporter of Happy Mammoth. Their latest release 'Dishface' is a new favourite of mine. - JY

If you were representing your trade at this fair, what would your title be?

Freelance music teacher.

I couldn't support myself as a music maker in the foreseeable future. I am currently living on savings and making a small income from teaching and working as a film extra so I could not realistically call this a career.

Why do you make your art? What is it that drives you?

I make my art because I enjoy the challenge and find the end result satisfying. I love playing live and I love rehearsing with a band. There is something great about the bonding experience. I think this applies to most collaborative art making as I get similar satisfaction from bonding with casts when I'm acting.

How do you pay your rent and other living expenses?

I currently pay my rent with money I saved up when I was working a full time office job. The extras work is supplementary income that isn't related to my art. I hope eventually to make the vast majority of my living from teaching.

Are you in education?

What is the relationship between making art and academia?

I went to university at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance. It was related in a broad sense but was not specific to what I really wanted to do. I did want to study pop music but I wanted to further my musical ability and knowledge.

In your opinion, how long have you been an artist for and where have you worked in this time?

I think I have been an artist for around 10 years. I have studied and worked in admin for most of this time.

**What have you experienced as a challenge/frustration to your practice?
Cultural preconceptions?**

For me, the biggest frustration/challenge is not knowing how to get exposure/build a following for gigs. If you cannot bring your own audience, it is virtually impossible to get paid gigs in London.

I often find songwriting frustrating but for some reason, I still keep doing it. Money and the industry are a massive problem. Music piracy and greedy business people means that there is not much money in music for smaller musicians and it is very hard to make it sustainable.

What's the difference between a child and an artist? Can anyone work as an artist?

Being an artist requires elements of a child-like mindset. I think being an artist requires an element of analytical thinking and editing of creative output which most children do not have. I don't think that anyone can be an artist. You need to want to be and you need to be able to accept that it is not always viewed as being sensible and grown up by a large portion of society.

What traits do you think good artists have?

I think that there are so many different ways to work and so many nuances to what make a good artists that this question is almost impossible to answer this question.

Who are some artists that you find inspiring?

Thom Yorke, Joni Mitchell, Paddy McAloon

Who do you socialise with? Are all your friends artists too? How do you meet new people?

I only have one or two friends who are not artists. Most of these friends are still interested in art. My friends who are not specifically interested in art, tend to perceive beauty or wonder in some aspect of life in a way which I feel is similar to art appreciation.

I don't meet many new people. If I do, it tends to be through music.

ANDREA DE LA CRUZ BARRAL

SPAIN

“A CITY GIVES YOU THE FALSE ILLUSION OF FREEDOM AND OPPORTUNITY. IT’S NOT ABOUT THE NETWORK, ‘GET OUT THERE, GET A JOB’, NO, IT’S ABOUT CREATING YOUR OWN JOB. THAT’S WHAT AN ARTIST DOES.”

Andrea is currently based in London but will soon be moving away. She’s got a one way ticket to Berlin and then at some point a Steiner scholarship awaits her in Switzerland. She’s a producer and theatre maker. She spent the last 18 months working at Somerset House with Creative Society, championing paid internships for young people moving into the arts. Someone said to her recently “In 10 years time, you’re going to be the head of Arts Council England.” - JY

If you were representing your trade at this fair, what would your title be?

Art enabler

What does that mean?

A mentor, a teacher that helps others realise their potential. Something I’m good at is making others realise how good they are. This is why I loved producing; I loved being able to sit with an artist and say: ‘What you are making is amazing. What can I do to help you with that because you have to have that support.’ I am drawn to how I can help others realise their potential. It makes me feel alive.

A job without a vocation is nothing. Let’s talk about unemployment; there are statistics that show that people who are unemployed and people who are in employment but in a job that they don’t like have the same chances of being depressed. That says something. It’s not about having any job, it’s not about having work, it’s about doing the work you know you are here to do.

In any industry if you move to London, you’re guaranteed a job but what if you’ve grown up not knowing what job you should be doing? I feel lucky because I’ve got an internal compass that tells me when I’m doing the things I love to do and when I am not so sure. When I’m making theatre, when I’m making art, when I’m coming up with ideas, when I’m workshopping, when I’m working on things I love, I physically feel completely different.

So if you don’t guide people from a very young age to find that internal compass in themselves, they are going to follow the path of ‘I need to find a job.’ Instead of ‘I need to have an experience that is fulfilling and brings me an income’ because

I'm not kidding myself, I know I need to pay the rent and bills and food and so on but there are ways of doing that. I'm interested in the idea of how education can help young people find their vocations straight away. Explore, interrogate.

Why do you make your art? What is it that drives you?

Process of creating. It's not because I like the painting at the end of the day, it's the process, the process of making the painting. There is something that art helps you understand which is that pleasure of making, of making something happen. It doesn't matter what it is that you're doing as long as you're feeling that pleasure in progress. You could be creating an electrical network in a building as long as that is contributing to your experience of "I am making something; I am creating." You could be doing a completely paper work based job as long as you understand what world you are contributing to. That's why it's important for any person to develop an artistic practice. I don't necessarily make theatre, but every time I make something I want to feel like I feel when I'm making theatre; I want to feel collaboration, I want to feel inspiration, I want to feel hard work, I'm putting little pieces together – like an engineer or an architect probably feels when they design a building. Art allows you to understand process.

How do you pay for your rent and other living expenses?

There has to be a way to do what you love and get the income. And if there is no way, if the city is not bringing you that opportunity then you have to make it. You have to make it happen. Because otherwise you die. Even if your body doesn't die, you will die.

A city gives you the false illusion of freedom and opportunity. I've never been a nature person, I feel myself in the city, because I grew up in a city. I think one of the differences between nature and city is that in the city you are told that the opportunity comes from the city; the city is bringing you opportunity. In the country side where there is a bare space, it's not nature and it's not the inspiration that nature brings, it's that you are able to create your own opportunity and I think that's the trick of creativity in general... It doesn't just apply to artists.

It's about what reality you want to create for yourself and the trap of the city which I personally feel like I've fallen is that unless I'm here [in the city], unless I'm part of this hub, unless I'm having these conversations, I'm not grabbing each opportunity. But it's not about me grabbing them, it's about me creating them... It's not about network, 'get out there, get a job', no, it's about creating your own job and that's what an artist does.

Are you in education? What is the relationship between making art and academia?

The more you train people to care about the end product rather than the process (very much the case in a large portion of educational pedagogy) then the least

people are focused on the contribution they make. Practising art, with a focus on process can help illuminate vocation in academia.

What have you experienced as a challenge/frustration to your practice?

Bureaucracy – it sets up norms and binaries of the singular success and failure, which takes away the working individual's ability to create and contribute to the bigger picture in a meaningful way as responsibility becomes arbitrary.

Who are some artists you find inspiring?

Augusto Boal, Sir Ken Robinson, Jerzy Grotowski

Tell me a story

When I got on stage very young, I felt that I could reach out to everything, that I was beyond my body, I was capable of holding everyone's attention in the room just by being in front of them.

It feels like a light that opens up and takes you around the stage, you don't need to think of the words, you don't need to think of the movements, you don't need to think of the reason why, because it's there, all of that is present in the room with you and you are just a mouthpiece for that communication to happen.

It's the feeling of "I love this moment, what I'm doing right now, I know that this is right, it makes perfect and absolute sense." When you feel like that you are able to make decisions that take you on a journey.

ISABEL LYSTER

UK

**“I AM DRIVEN BY A WANT TO CREATE THINGS,
AND ALSO BY CONNECTING TO PEOPLE.
I LOVE THE DIALOGUE.”**

Bella and I are close collaborators that met at university. We were on different courses, but we had some overlapping projects. I was always in awe of the material vocabulary puppeteers had, the ability to balance making a piece of tangible work and then breathing life into it in performance. At the time, the puppetry form was just making a contemporary revival into theatres and operas so the course seemed to gain a lot of spotlight as the only puppetry course in the UK at the time. - JY

If you were representing your trade at this fair, what would your title be?

Puppeteer and Visual Artist. I am currently working with a emerging theatre company called Raised Eyebrows Theatre.

Why do you make your art? What is it that drives you?

I enjoy using my hands, using my mind and applying a visual style. I think I am driven by a want to create things, and also by connecting with people. I love the dialogue.

How do you pay for your rent and other living expenses?

I work on a project-by-project basis with performance work. When making puppets, I work to commission for theatre companies. I also teach puppetry at Central School of Speech and Drama, this is a flexible on-going job, which helps me buy food when I am hungry! More recently I have developed more woodworking/carpentry skills, this provides work when all else dries up. It uses a lot of the making skills I already have- and is a nice profession to dip in and out of.

Are you in education? What is the relationship between making art and academia?

I graduated from Central School of Speech and Drama about 4 years ago. Currently I have been attending a part time furniture making course.

In your opinion, how long have you been an artist for?

I really believe everyone is an artist their whole life.

Who do you socialise with? Are all your friends artists too? How do you meet new people?

At the moment my friends are very spread out. A lot of my friends from London are performance makers, I have some very close friends around the world who i hold close to my heart but don't see often. I follow their work online and feel inspired and encouraged by them.

In Stroud my friends all do different jobs– retail, cafe work, teaching, carpentry, building. I have just started working with a theatre company– at first strangers– but now becoming friends!

What have you experienced as a challenge/frustration to your practice?

Since moving out of London to live in Stroud (a small town) I have really missed a creative network of friends to collaborate with. I have never found money to be much of a problem. I am very determined though... and have worked lots of different jobs along the way.

What's the difference between a child and an artist? Can anyone work as an artist?

Children are brilliant artists. Yes anyone can work as an artist!!!

What traits do you think good artists have?

Intuition, determination, observation, an eye for detail, individual eccentricities, explorer.

Who are some artists that you find inspiring?

Sebastiao Salgado, Louis Bourgeois, Nic Green

Tell me a story

I spent a week with my boyfriend's family in France last year. We were all leading up to an Easter fete– where we would have food, music, ridiculous games, a treasure hunt and a selection of performances. I opted to make a puppet show. Me and about 7 of the other family and friends spent an afternoon with old dusty puppets, toys and costumes. Giggling away, we improvised a show for the evening, we found a couple of people who played instruments and got them to join in. It was the most joyful experience of performance making– so quick to create. The fun was captured perfectly– we sang and made silly jokes and the audience laughed and enjoyed it. I always think back to this day when I'm planning a workshop and hope to capture the fun and communal spirit of performance making.

ALAN FIELDEN

UK/KOREA

“ONLY MY ART IS REAL. EVERYTHING ELSE IS A KIND OF PERFORMANCE. I INHABIT A BODY THAT IS VICTIM TO PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL PRESSURES. BUT MY ART CAN BE PURE, BEAUTIFUL, TRUE, JUST, DIGNIFIED.”

Alan is based in London. Last year, he wrote a play a day 99 days before his birthday (I highly recommend you find this on the internet). He recently sent me an article with a poignant highlight of an Antonio Gramsci phrase “pessimism of the intellect and optimism of the will”, I think this very astutely encapsulates the way we approach ‘reality’. Al and I run a theatre collective together (which he refers to as his band) and play ROOM. I think he is probably the only playwright I will ever work with. - JY

If you were representing your trade at this fair, what would your title be?

I am a Theatre Maker.

My disciplines are writing, directing and performing.

I have my own band called National Art Service, I'm part of an asylum called ROOM and I've just started a long-form joke called You Are Already Dead.

Why do you make your art? What is it that drives you?

I think deep down we're all desperate to communicate in some meaningful manner. And be revealed. To take off our clothes, shake off the flesh, cut through the tedium and masquerade and personas and suffocation and be seen, acknowledged, 'I am here'.

I am driven by needing to express the noise in my head. I don't know why but there is a gas in my brain and I have to make it solid.

I'm typing this, trying to explain, and falling far short it feels futile. So much to say and I can't say it and I have to say it. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I_Have_No_Mouth,_and_I_Must_Scream

Only my art is real. Everything else is a kind of performance. I inhabit a body that is victim to physical and social pressures. But my art can be pure, beautiful, true, just, dignified. When I'm singing I feel like a better person.

How do you pay your rent and other living expenses?

I live with my parents mostly rent free. I earn money through freelance copy-writing which is irregular, and occasionally through my art work.

In your opinion, how long have you been an artist for and where have you worked in this time?

I've been an artist the whole time. Nothing ever made sense to me and I never felt – or wanted to be – human. I've always felt outside the experience of being.

I have worked in theatres, churches, hotels, toilets, tents, bedrooms, derelict buildings, cars, office blocks, galleries...

What have you experienced as a challenge/frustration to your practice?

Mirror needs to know what mirror looks like?

What's the difference between a child and an artist? Can anyone work as an artist?

Children become adults.
Children are generally shorter.
If you know you can, you can.

What traits do you think good artists have?

You follow a silver thread into a black forest. You see it catch the moonlight. You feel it in your hand, thin, delicate. Too dark to see now.

Who are some artists that you find inspiring?

Beckett. Artaud. Chan Marshall. E. E. Cummings, Buchner

Tell me a story

There was a moment some way into directing my first piece, amidst the fear, that I felt like I belonged. It was the first time in my life I'd ever felt that.

Who are the people immediately around you? Who do you socialise with? Are all your friends artists too? How do you meet new people?

Most of my friends are involved in arts and culture. I meet people through friends, at events, at parties. I like talking to people who don't work in the arts. I think most artists are very open to meeting, and having friends, outside of the arts.

FAB GORJIAN UK

**“DO IT BECAUSE YOU LOVE IT, BECAUSE YOU NEED TO.
NOT BECAUSE YOU WANT TO BUY A VILLA IN SPAIN.”**

Fab is an Iranian born, British-bred writer and fine artist. He is based in London. His latest work is a series of handmade skulls and sculptures of old-school tattoo flash. I often view his work with my mouth agape. He has magic hands. Sometimes he sends me his stories; some give me dreams, some nightmares. - JY

If you were representing your trade at this fair, what would your title be?

I'd be Fab Gore, storyteller. I could show examples of illustrations, sculptures and somehow writing, recordings of verbal storytelling, to show that telling a story is almost a universal practice in art.

Why do you make your art? What is it that drives you?

There are a few things that drive me to make art. One is my ego; I am a show-off and I feed on praise and wonder, and on chills. On a more selfless level, making art and having it be received in some way is my way of connecting with other human beings, something that can be hard outside of the artistic context. To know you might have challenged, provoked, enriched someone's mind in any way is very humbling and beautiful. I also learn so much about myself, about others, and about life in general from making art.

How do you pay for your rent and other living expenses?

My full time job will one day (soon) be my way of earning a living, but for now it is the opposite. It costs me money that I'm yet to make back. I do not advise art for anyone is income-driven. Unless you are very lucky and very connected in your industry, you will most likely not make money – at least not for many years. Do it because you love it, because you need to. Not because you want to by a villa in Spain.

Are you in education? What is the relationship between making art and academia?

I've been to many different colleges/universities, leaving all but one in a state of dissatisfaction. My memory of them is being surrounded by very inartistic people who knew how to play the school's games and earn their top grades. My last school, though far more enriching, also focussed on the wrong things, in my view. Our creative projects were never assessed on their own merits. Rather, our grades were given based on the termly essays we submitted, assessing our own experience during the project. It's truly ludicrous on many levels. On one hand, our teachers are admitting that they feel unworthy of assessing our creative output, and so they fall back on assessing an essay. Also, our school systems are telling us that creativity – though we are training in it, practising in it, and care about it so much – is useless in the real world. Only a sense of professional and detached technicality will get us anywhere in life. And even more sadly, perhaps they are right.

In your opinion, how long have you been an artist for and where have you worked in this time?

I would probably say I first became an artist at around 16, when I started writing stories. Before that, I was entirely focussed on drawing and painting, but all I was doing was copying from comic books. Actually when I was about 12 I started inventing my own superheroes and villains, so probably then. I'd say you're an artist when you start creating anything, rather than copying/learning.

What have you experienced as a challenge/frustration to your practice? Cultural preconceptions? Your family? Money? Country? Resources? Exposure? The actual process of making work? Working alone? Working collaboratively? "The Industry"? Funding Constraints? Indecision?

All of those things. All of those things. Mostly the feeling that the world at large doesn't care about what I'm doing – which in a way only makes me want to make more.

What's the difference between a child and an artist? Can anyone work as an artist?

Yes, in my opinion, an artist is one who creates new things from what is already in them, from cultural sources to genetic qualities. If you make in any way, (and by 'make' I'm not just implying physical things) then you might be called an artist. Though in that respect, that makes any parent an artist.

Who do you socialise with? Are all your friends artists too? How do you meet new people?

My friends, closest and dearest, are all artists of some kind. Whilst that is very healthy, I also believe that I need to meet new people; people from other backgrounds, to stay alive with what it means to be a resident of this

planet. Ordinarily I meet new people through existing friends, but there I meet more artists. I'm going to start attending various 'meet-ups' as advertised online, to see who's lives can start to mix with mine.

What traits do you think good artists have?

Fearlessness, vulnerability, unbridled passion, love/lust, deep sensitivity, deep empathy, skill, and a big fat ego.

Who are some artists that you find inspiring?

JMW Turner, as someone who introduced the vague into art. It didn't really exist before he started painting those very washed-out, nebulous, foggy paintings that ask you to imagine most of what is happening. The film-maker Stephen Polliakoff, who makes films that are so profoundly human, warm, reflective, strange, dreamlike and sometimes deeply tense, but tells these stories with absolutely no fanfare. The author Ray Bradbury, that rare mix of brilliance and insane productivity. He described writing like breathing: all day, everyday. He tried his hand at nearly every genre and succeeded in creating nothing but excellent, though-provoking, imaginative fiction.

Tell me a story

I remember the feeling of standing in a large hall full of hundreds of kids. I was 21, the oldest you can be to be accepted into the prestigious National Youth Theatre. I wanted to be an actor when I was around that age, and I began auditioning at all the top schools. But at every audition I was just too nervous, just too self-conscious, and I couldn't perform, and so I didn't get in. yet at the NYT audition, I spent the day there. It was a workshop-format audition, rather than a 'come in and do your monologue and leave' audition, so I spent the day larking about with kids, making them laugh, and gaining a bunch of loyal buddies that followed me around all day. I spent time with a very nervous kid called George who asked if he could practice in front of me outside, so we did and it helped, he said. Then it was my go. The people who were looking over my application as I waited outside the room were remarking that they liked the things I'd written. I'd answered to the question 'can you sing?' with 'I'll try', and to 'can you dance?' with 'again, I'll try'. They liked that. Then I went in, and I killed it. I was brilliant, even completely going unphased by a fire-alarm that went off in the very middle of my audition. I got it, and I was very proud, as were my parents. So now back to the first day, standing in that large hall. I know now why I ran away and never came back, and it was because I was afraid of succeeding, afraid of meeting all these kids and once again seeing if I can get on with anybody. They were all talking to each other as though they knew each other very well, though they must have been largely strangers. I convinced myself that this just wasn't for me. That I'm not meant to be an actor. I'm not even sure what my bullshit excuses were at the time. I do know that now, though I'm utterly happy with what I do, there will always be a part of me that regrets, deeply, that I didn't stay. I try to remember that now when I feel like backing-out of something.

JONATHAN HEADON UK

**“...EVEN IF YOUR CAMERA IS ON FIRE,
ACT LIKE EVERYTHING IS UNDER CONTROL AND
MOVE ON TO A PRACTICAL NEXT STEP”**

Jonathan and I met when he was working one of his odd jobs. He was a host in a communal pay-per-minute social cafe space called Ziferblat. Jona's London based company Tenniss made a stunning trilogy of short trailers for a show I work on called ROOM. - JY

If you were representing your trade at this fair, what would your title be?

I am a filmmaker. I write, direct and edit short films and other video work for my collaborative called 'Tenniss'.

Why do you make your art? What is it that drives you?

I make art because I want to be liked. Just kidding. Maybe. Whenever I see a film or music video that I love I immediately think of the pride the artist must have felt upon completion. That sense of gratitude you can get from an audience is wonderful. I find I want to make people happy, I want them to enjoy what I've created for them. Even though initially a project starts out as my own idea and a want for me, as soon as it's underway it stops being mine because I realise that soon enough it's going to be given out to people far and wide. So I stop thinking about how it pleases me, and focus on how to make audiences happiest.

How do you pay for your rent and other living expenses?

I do odd jobs to fund my art instead of working in my industry. I have friends who do both and they say they've lost inspiration in their personal work because it's all just work for them. I don't want to risk that, so I keep my options open. The benefit is the more random the job the more diverse and unique the experience is. As a writer and filmmaker, getting outside experiences is great to log away for future influences.

Who do you socialise with? Are all your friends artists too? How do you meet new people?

I don't intend to surround myself with artists, but most of my best friends are creatives, which is no surprise. It's reassuring to learn that you're not the only one struggling artistically in this world. It's also great when you know you can help another person out with their art. You learn about yourself in that process too; your likes/dislikes/skills you never knew you had/wanted. However, having said that, my best friend from school is a hotel manager. We share other interests, but whenever the topic turns to my art the conversation can only go so far. It's strange, but as long as we both love to play squash we'll be all right.

Are you in education? What is the relationship between making art and academia?

I graduated in Animation production at the Arts University Bournemouth. The main thing I understood regarding the relationship between making art and academia is DEADLINES and MOTIVATION. There are deadlines and expectations of you, and if you don't meet them you can't continue to the next stage – It's just good practice. Also, I suppose if your peers are getting higher grades than you, it's really easy to find out what they're doing differently as you're all doing the same thing. I personally feel it's easier to get things done as you're constantly surrounded talent and determination and you don't want to be left behind. It's a good kick!

In your opinion, how long have you been an artist for and where have you worked in this time?

I think the correct answer is 'all my life', but the real answer is 'since I graduated'. My grad film 'The Amazing Elephant Man' was the first substantial piece of work I had completed and presented to the world. I believe you must create for someone other than yourself to truly be an artist, i.e. you can't become a lawyer and keep that to yourself. Expose yourself to the good and the bad of having your work out there. Those emotions you feel fuel you to do the next thing differently. The amount of work and time and stress I'd put into starting and finishing it and having it screen all over the globe was the biggest step for me believing I was an artist.

What have you experienced as a challenge/frustration to your practice? Cultural preconceptions? Your family? Money? Country? Resources? Exposure? The actual process of making work? Working alone? Working collaboratively? "The Industry"? Funding Constraints? Indecision?

All of the above! But the most difficult is starting out. Unless you're the luckiest kid with parents in the industry before you or other connections, it's hard figuring out how to begin. I particularly struggled crossing over from animation with no connections or knowledge, or even a camera! It's figuring out where to get your knowledge from and finding out how to apply it. But the biggest hurdle for me was just simply starting; setting that date of when to shoot and start calling

yourself a director or filmmaker without worrying what people might think. I know it's easier said than done, but you really just have to begin no matter what. Oh, and then after you've done what you've set out to do, if it isn't as good as you thought it was going to be, committing and then doing it again... and again... and again. And actually accepting that it's not as good as you thought it'd be. Learn to do that as soon as possible, otherwise you'd just get yourself down. Yeah... it doesn't get easier because the more you do the more you expect from yourself, the more you'd want to be better than the last thing you did. It's crazy! I don't know why we do it to ourselves.

What's the difference between a child and an artist? Can anyone work as an artist?

There is no difference, so long as what was created was intentional. Art is a result of creative purpose.

I don't think anyone can work as an artist. It is not easy. Sometimes I don't even work as an artist. Sometimes I need to step away from art and do something completely normal so I can appreciate the magic of creating art later.

What traits do you think good artists have?

Good artists have that determination. They get stuff done, most of the time for no reason. And even if they're not 100% happy with it, they'll fight with it until the finish and learn from whatever went wrong and figured out why they weren't happy with it. Also, good artists do things because other people have asked them to, not only because they want to. That in itself is a good trait, understanding there is an outside want or need for something to exist and it is now your responsibility to bring it into this world.

Who are some artists you find inspiring?

I find commercial/music video directors most inspiring. Daniel Wolfe, BRTHR, Karim Huu Do, Hiro Murai. It's being able to take something as short as 30 seconds to 5 minutes and holding my full attention throughout, but then also forcing me to come back and revisit it soon after. It's not a big endeavour watching a great music video. Time is never an issue when listening to your favourite song and seeing what imagery will assist it. Creating visuals so captivating for music is an incredible talent, that two completely separate entities can coexist as if they were born together.

Tell me a story

On my first short film 'BANQUET', we'd intended to shoot this short in one night. It was set in a stairwell in Waterloo. We didn't have permission to shoot there but I didn't care, I couldn't afford it, so it didn't even cross my mind to check. Anyway, we shot it and all went home. The next day we checked the footage and none of it was useable. The camera settings must have been incorrect, the picture too dark and most of the compositions were off. My fault was I didn't look through the

camera monitor when we were setting up each shot. I trusted my cameraman too much and I focused on live performances. I didn't want to be a director who lived through the monitor.

I had to call everyone for a reshoot of the whole film again the next weekend. Fortunately, they were all friends so it wasn't so bad, but we were shooting Sunday night so it still wasn't that great. Second night of shooting and everything is going great: I'm double checking compositions, my fake blood is the perfect colour and consistency, and everyone is cold but happy to be there. Then an old man comes up the stairwell and sees the blood and guts from my actor (who reassured him that he was okay and it's NOT real). He quickly goes back down, and then ten minutes later he returns with a security guard who kicks us out for not having a shooting permit.

It was inevitable that we'd all have to come back again to finish the film. So we did. We turn up the following Sunday. Everyone is ready to go. It's freezing but it's okay. Let's make a movie! Then I noticed my fake blood made from honey and food colouring wasn't red. It was brown! Mentally, I had given up! I went quiet and got angry with myself for not getting my first film right, instead of quickly finding a solution and moving on! I felt like everyone was fed up and I was wasting their time. I didn't know how to continue. Then someone suggested they run to the nearest Sainsbury's to buy more food colouring. Problem kind of solved! And then we made the film and finished. That very night, I wrote about how I handled the film and how I could be better next time and every time after that. I realised that even if your camera is on fire, act like everything is under control and move on to a practical next step. As a director of people, you can't ever let your cast or crew sniff even the faintest hint of fear or uncertainty. That's when you lose them, and if you lose them you lose everything.

LOUKIA PIERIDES

CYPRUS

“... AN IMPORTANT, CRUCIAL THING A STUDENT NEEDS TO DO IN ACADEMIA IS TO BE A BAD STUDENT...TAKE FULL ADVANTAGE OF THE FACT THAT A UNI OR ART SCHOOL IS A SAFE ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH ONE CAN EXPERIMENT, EXPERIMENT, EXPERIMENT AND FAIL AND FAILURE WON'T MATTER.”

Loukia works between the UK, France and Cyprus. She is a one woman powerhouse with an intricately honed performance craft. I first met Loukia at an audition National Art Service was hosting. She got the part of 1 in The Winning Crowd, which won us an award for best cast. She has performed in every NAS show since. - JY

If you were representing your trade at this fair, what would your title be?

I am a performer and theatre maker. I focus on the creation of original work, both as an individual and in collaboration with other theatre companies.

Why do you make your art? What is it that drives you?

Beauty drives me. Beauty for me becomes more tangible through the arts.

By beauty I refer to life, infinity, that emotion you sometimes feel when watching something that makes your hair stand on end or makes you feel nostalgic. By beauty I refer to disorientation of the senses and yes, beauty is sometimes just plain good ol' entertainment.

How do you pay your rent and other living expenses?

Do you have an on-the-side money-earning job (e.g. People commission me to make websites)? How regular is that? If your full time job is making your art, say that.

When living in London I had a part-time job catering. Which was perfect because they would work around my schedule instead of the other way around.

But still, my parents had to help me sometimes, as I could not afford to pay for everything whilst living in a place like London.

Are you in education?

What is the relationship between making art and academia?

I went to Hull University to study Drama, followed by an MA (ATP) at RCSSD. I then worked in London for 4 years and then got a scholarship for 2 years in Paris – at Lecoq and with Gaulier.

Basically, through my experiences so far, I have realised that an important, crucial thing a student needs to do in academia is to be a bad student. By that I mean to not try and please neither professors nor his/her peeps. To not try and do well. A student needs to take full advantage of the fact that a uni or art school is a safe environment in which one can experiment, experiment, experiment and fail and failure won't matter. Failure at school is safe; it is not the real world. I wish I was more daring at school and less willing to please. I wish I was more anarchic because maybe, in that way, I would have discovered things sooner than I have. Being a bad student is the only way to come closer to who you are. By trying hard to do well and please you are just feeding people's egos and you are just repeating well-known recipes of how to make work well, what people like blah blah blah. And then you just become a copy of so many copies that have come out of the same school and we all look the same.

In your opinion, how long have you been an artist for and where have you worked in this time?

I have worked in London, Paris and Cyprus.

I am only just becoming. Since The Egg Soup because this experience revealed part of my identity as a theatre maker.

What have you experienced as a challenge/frustration to your practice? Cultural preconceptions? Your family? Money? Country? Resources? Exposure? The actual process of making work? Working alone? Working collaboratively? "The Industry"? Funding Constraints? Indecision?

All the above you have mentioned but I think number one would be the money. Unfortunately...

What's the difference between a child and an artist? Can anyone work as an artist?

Anyone can call themselves an artist and anyone can get an education for it and that is why there are so many of us. But so very few stand out.

A person who thinks too much cannot stand out . (in my opinion). A person who speaks too much also. A boring person yes.

Anyone who would rather think, speak instead of DO cannot stand out.
Playfulness to me is the key.

The difference between a child and an artist? You need to think about money and suddenly the play turns into a job. Also, suddenly you need to give meaning and reason to the play and sometimes even make it intellectual. Which I rarely approve of.

What traits do you think good artists have?

Curiosity, Anarchy, Uncompromising, Diversity, Intuition.

Who are some artists that you find inspiring?

David Lynch, Clod Ensemble, Patti Smith

Who do you socialise with? Are all your friends artists too? How do you meet new people?

Yes, all the people around me as artists. Any friends that are not they are childhood friends.

I was talking about this with a friend recently actually. That artists have a specific way of thinking and it is very rare to find a connection with people who are not in the arts. We have a different way of looking and our lives are not based on routine, hobbies, 9–5pm jobs. This little detail, in itself, makes our lives different from others. Artists are tight groups, and it is very difficult for non-artists to access and for artists to step out from.

ALVIN PANG SINGAPORE

“TO ASSURE MY PARENTS THAT I WASN’T THROWING MY LIFE AWAY ON A WHIM, I FIBBED THAT “TEACHING SCHOLARS HAVE A SHOT AT BEING MINISTER OF EDUCATION ONE DAY”. AN EARLY, MADE-UP FABLE. A WHITE-ON-WHITE LIE.”

Alvin is a Singapore based poet, editor and writer. In 2005 he was named Young Artist of the Year for Literature by the National Arts Council. Alvin and my dad took a course together, one exercise in that workshop was the founding inspiration for Pang’s 2011 book of creative prose “What Gives Us Our Names”. The fabric of his work is rich and rooted; weaving colloquialism with a larger pursuit of what it means to be human. One of my favourite poems of his is called “Singapore”. - JY

If you were representing your trade at this fair, what would your title be?

Word Wizard. I work magic with language. Sometimes I am a barber of ideas: I trim, prune, perm and cut until the become clear on the page. At other times, I make it rain.

Why do you make your art? What is it that drives you?

Because I can. Because it is beautiful. Because it is pleasurable. Because it makes me feel less alone. Because it makes me feel more alive. Because whether we admit it or not, people want and need magic in their lives. Because I don’t have all the answers. Because nobody does. Because the questions matter. Because we still don’t really know what to say to the dying.

How do you pay for your rent and other living expenses?

Many people need their words shorn of clutter. Everybody’s ideas needs a shave now and again. Ever so often people call me up and say “Alvin, we need you to work your magic on this.” Or “Alvin, can you conjure something up for us?” It is a remarkably lucrative and under-served business. I have to turn down people very often. There is plenty of room for more of us.

Are you in education? What is the relationship between making art and academia?

I have been asked to teach a semester on Creative Writing: Poetry at Yale–NUS, which I enjoy tremendously. It is part of my portfolio of activities. I didn't go to art school nor to wizard school, but I did learn from some of the best past examples of the craft in the world at university while studying English and Related Literature, and that helps, but I wouldn't say it's a must.

In your opinion, how long have you been an artist for and where have you worked in this time?

I've been word-weirding since I was 13. It led me to university as a scholar, after which I've been a teacher, a policymaking civil servant, a journalist, a web developer, an editor-at-large, a poet, a translator, a lecturer. Different spells, same magic. The more I focussed on my craft rather than a day job, the bigger my pay check. I work from home and pay almost the top bracket in taxes.

What have you experienced as a challenge/frustration to your practice?

I used to have to explain to people what I do and what value I bring to the table, even though it is well established elsewhere. I used to have to hide my wizardly abilities in order to fit in. This did no favours either to my own conscience nor to the job at hand. I sometimes have had to point out the shortcomings of other people's mediocrity in order to justify my own intervention. Not everyone is willing to see what's in front of them. There is never enough time to do everything one wants to do, and sometimes one's own private pursuits or health take a hit, and with it one's productivity. You have to nurture and look after yourself and your own spirit, or you are no good to anyone. This applies to any profession in the world.

What's the difference between a child and an artist? Can anyone work as an artist?

Magic calls for control. A child can sometimes see it and perhaps even dabble in it, but a true artist can wield it with precision and flair. Anyone able and willing to cultivate the necessary finesse can be an artist, but they must first be able to apprehend the inherent magic of language.

What traits do you think good artists have?

Curiosity, delight in ambiguity, a sense of wonder, persistence, thick skin, perfectionism, impatience with mediocrity, compassion, intuition, humility.

Who are some artists that you find inspiring?

Seamus Heaney, Leonardo Da Vinci, Dante

Tell me a story

I used to make up my own lyrics to an indie pop rock group of my own invention, called GANGRENOUS HEAP OF PRIMORDIAL FILTH (GHOPF). Inspired by Depeche Mode and The Smiths and U2, I wrote songs such as Drag us to the Slaughter and Tie Me Up To My Own Marriage Bed. One of these won a school Poetry Writing Competition, and set me on the path I still tread today.

When I gave up my place in NUS Law to study Literature in the UK on a teaching scholarship, my father (a career teacher) tried to dissuade me from what he saw as a difficult profession with limited prospects. To assure my parents that I wasn't throwing my life away on a whim, I fibbed that "teaching scholars have a shot at being Minister of Education one day". An early, made-up fable. A white-on-white lie.

At 42, I am not so much self-made as self-making. Still making it up as I go along.

<http://alvinpang.tumblr.com/post/103779648717/making-it-up>

Who do you socialise with? Are all your friends artists too? How do you meet new people?

Civil servants who write, army Majors who write, designers who write, bookstore owners, journalists, pub owners, bankers, publishers, teachers who write, lawyers who write, photographers, illustrators, mothers. Because word weirding takes me around the world and into many different fields across all sectors of life, I have no problem meeting new people and having something to talk about. It's magic, really.

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