

Article 1

Since September 2008 we have been curating and presenting work-in progress events. The first of these was SHOW US YER BITS!, then we introduced Bitten – where invited artists return to show their work at a more developed stage after having participated in SUYB; and most recently we've begun SHOW US YER GUERRILLA BITS! – our attempt at a work-in-progress event for pop-up live art.

We started talking recently about where we stand now, a few years down the line, on the culture of work-in-progress showings – and also on the closely related culture of 'scratch'. We've decided to turn this into a research project:

Question 1: what's the difference between thinking and talking about something in depth with colleagues, and a 'research project'?

Possible A: 'Tangible outputs'?

We started the SHOW US YER BITS! series because we felt the lack of a productive, structured forum in which to show early work and gain focused audience feedback. Q&As, feedback sessions, post-show talks, often seemed vague and rambling to us, with neither audience nor artist being quite sure what was expected of them. We are fortunate that we have some extremely useful, hard-eyed, interrogative friends who will watch our work and really help us drill down into what we are trying to do. But we didn't always have/know these people, and we wanted to find a way to offer any artist a collection of scrutineers who would constructively and intricately talk about the work with them, being guided by questions that the artists themselves have about their own work. So that was the impetus.

We have questions about the SUYB model and its evolution, but it's the larger questions that are emerging for us about work-in-progress as a genre (?) that we want to talk about more widely first.

On September 23rd 2011, we held Bitten at the Roundhouse. We always show or share something at Bitten, after the invited artists. This time, instead of showing performance work, we held a discussion with participating artists, past and present, and the audience, to kick start this research project.

Perhaps we could overview the project with these questions:

- What are the difficulties artists face when showing work at an early stage, and how can artists *best* be facilitated through W-I-P opportunities?
- Do the cultures of scratch and W-I-P create difficulties for artists when making work? What are these problems and why have they emerged?

Below we've tried to account for (some of) what came up in the 25-minute discussion we had on the 23rd:

Some points that came up are:

- When showing work-in-progress what is the balance between questioning the work and gaining exposure for the work/artist?
- Can work-in-progress showings encourage artists to edit too quickly?
- How do the following relate to artists' experiences of W-I-P showings: ticket prices, conventions of space, structure/form of giving feedback.
- Do unpaid opportunities contribute to artists under-valuing their work (both financially and artistically)?

And a question that has emerged for us as a company is:

- Are scratch and W-I-P events relevant and relatable to the making processes of Live Artists?

A key:

Q2: What's the difference between 'scratch' and 'work-in-progress'?

Possible A: SCRATCH – an opportunity for artists to test material in front of an audience without feedback – or without specifically structured feedback.

WORK-IN-PROGRESS: an opportunity for artists to show work they are developing and seek answers to specific questions about that work.

Possible A: SCRATCH – to try out an idea that you're not even sure you want to continue with/you will find significant content within.

W-I-P: to show a section of some work you are committed to and have properly started making.

The other big issue highlighted on the 23rd was money.

Options:

The audience pay a fixed fee to see work-in-progress?

The audience 'pay-what-you-can' to see work-in-progress?

The artists take a box office split? Thus perhaps get some money towards further development of work. The venue/curators get some money for hosting the night.

The audience don't pay at all?

The venue get nothing, the artists get nothing.

The artists feel less pressure to present something of quality? Feel more able to present risky work?

Feel more able to fail?

The possibility of continued development of the project... Should a platform for showing W-I-P take some responsibility for this? We think so...

When money and time and space are provided for development of new work at a particular venue, followed by a showing, they are often then followed by nothing. No further money or time or space, leaving the artist with a partially developed, homeless piece of work, and no support to continue it. It can't be taken elsewhere because other venues are also looking to support completely new work by emerging artists. Where do we go for the middle part of the making process? Who wants to take that on?

Funding Applications Language: How can we live up to the hyperbole of funding applications?

COMMUNITY! INTERACTIVE! DEVELOPMENT! What do these words actually mean and how can we put them into practice? Lip service?

GENRE:

Is a work-in-progress event, in fact, a context for a style? We see a link between the growing interest in a scrappy aesthetic, celebrated amateurism and the performance of failure, and the trend for work-in-progress events. We, ourselves, have made work which purports to remain unfinished, even when it is. Are work-in-progress events springing up because they provide a natural home for this kind of material? Or is the context of W-I-P events creating a prevalence of this sort of material?

This first article is part of a work-in-progress. At this early stage, it's all about ideas. We haven't imposed a structure, and so far, we have very few answers. We are going to continue to show our work on this project.

