

CIRCUS ARTSPACE – INTERN PROGRAMME REPORT 2021

The Circus Artspace programme has entered a new phase of development in 2021, partly as a natural process of our evolution but also informed by changed access to gallery and studio space, plus continuing pandemic restrictions. This report summarises our main achievements in the delivery of the internship programme and arts graduate learning.

INTERN PROGRAMME

In Circus Artspace's third year, three interns have worked with us. We started the year with Sophie mid-way through her 4-month placement, followed by Taylor and Cara back on 3-month placements given that an online working culture and mechanisms for working within lockdown have now been established. Recruitment of our next intern has recently gone live with a January closing date.

We opened the selection criteria for the last 2 placements to allow young non-graduates with demonstrated interest and commitment to contemporary art to apply. This enabled Taylor and Cara to benefit from the programme as slightly younger interns coming from a different background and experience. They both have aspirations for further education but have not as yet had the opportunity. As a result, the intern learning and experience has been different for all of us.

In October we took time to consider an overview of the internship programme and the way forward, incorporating feedback from each of the intern's review sessions when they finished. Key points are summarised below.

- Working with a younger age group requires more dedicated support and mentoring to ensure momentum is maintained and the individuals maximise benefit to themselves. At present, we do not have the capacity to intensify one-to-one support for each intern.
- However, it has been rewarding to work with interns where we can support their path to access higher education in the arts. We would like to keep selection criteria open to those who may not have gained a degree, but we need to ensure they have sufficient ability and experience to self-direct.
- The intern's specific role and how they can contribute to Circus Artspace has not always been clear to them at times when there has been little face to face or public activity due to covid restrictions.
- Based on the above, going forward we plan to structure the internships slightly differently. We aim to link each internship to a specific project or event taking place during their placement, and to a named team member for main guidance. We hope this will provide a stronger learning focus to their placement. This may mean having slightly longer gaps between interns to match up with timeframes, rather than a constantly rolling programme.
- Open for applications now is the first in this trial series, an Exhibitions Intern to help co-ordinate and deliver our Graduate Associates series of exhibitions at Inverness Creative Academy in February/March 2022.

Below is a brief summary of our 2021 interns. Please see www.circus.scot for more detail.

Sophie Brown: Winter 2020/21 (27 October - 23 February)

Sophie worked with us on the second part of her internship at the start of 2021. She graduated with BA (Hons) in Painting at Grays School of Art, Aberdeen, 2020.

The Wicked Witch: an exploration into depictions of the witch in historical and contemporary artworks. Sophie developed a 2-part video series, discussing representations of folklore and “the witch” within historical and contemporary artworks by Female artists.

Circus Artspace hosted an online film screening on 21 February, via Zoom with Sophie presenting the premier of her new work and taking a questions and answers session.

“Given the current circumstances, the chance to display my work publicly was a huge opportunity – one that was especially significant given my own graduation lacked a physical degree show and my neglected degree show work had been lurking ominously without purpose in my attic for months.”

Taylor Black: Spring 2021 (9 March – 8 June)

Taylor grew up and lives in Fort William. Since studying textiles at West Highland College UHI, Taylor has spent a month learning traditional art & textiles techniques in a Slovakian Art School (2019) as well as undertaking an internship with Nonchalant fashion house in Torlundy (2020/21).

As the finale to Circus Artspace’s Zine Fest, Taylor produced and co-ordinated a fashion show to showcase his own new design line. He invited four other young designers to collaborate and present their design work in the show.

Taylor, on his new brand Prolusion: “Throughout all the lockdowns, many questions came up. One being what goes into personal growth, what you go through to feel fulfilled and successful from the space of defeats and triumphs came my two final prints. I took this thought and ran with it as I sought the outcome of channelling these thoughts to be a positive. The prints I created were developments of the space of personal growth captured in a visual atmosphere. Beginning with ink blots to reflect ones used in therapy, I developed these into a graphically designed print on black marbled velvet fabric.”

Cara Murray: Summer 2021 (22 June - 21 September)

Based in Inverness, Cara has a multi-disciplinary practice working mainly with sculpture, painting and film. Cara graduated from Manchester School of Art in 2019 with a Foundation Diploma - Fine Art Distinction. Previously she had been Studio Assistant for Highland Print Studio (2017-2018) and Wild Gorse Studio (2017-present). Cara is also a co-founder of Cailleach Collective which brings together four young women artists working in different parts of the Highlands.

During Cara’s placement, she attended the Art Grads Summer School and assisted in invigilation of Ian Kane’s exhibition. Throughout her internship, she was developing ideas for new work and exploring potential venue and format possibilities supported by one to one and group mentoring from Circus Artspace.

“Towards the end of my internship, I did a studio session in which I presented the work I had made for my project so far. This helped me contextualized the project and refined my ideas into what the physical work would be like. I also enjoyed sitting as a group and talking about the work and different ideas we had about it. I feel my time at Circus has benefited me greatly, providing me with new skills and knowledge in multiple areas that I will take with me into future opportunities in the arts.”

CIRCUS GRADUATE ASSOCIATES

Circus Graduate Associates is a development programme for emergent visual artists in the Highlands and Islands, Moray and Perthshire. This programme is delivered in partnership with the University of the Highlands and Islands and supported by XpoNorth and Creative Scotland.

Over ten months from March 2021, we have delivered a learning programme to develop the confidence and critical skills needed to thrive within the visual arts, bridging the gap for recent graduates between their visual art training and a freelance career within the sector.

All past interns were invited to participate free of charge. The cohort enrolment totalled 30 graduates who will exhibit their work in 5 smaller exhibition groups in Inverness in the new year. Creating this new contemporary arts community has enabled Circus Artspace past interns to make new connections in a wider network offering each other mutual support.

CIRCUS SIDESHOW

Sideshow was established in May 2020 by former interns to provide continuing mutual support. Sophie and Taylor were referred to Sideshow to become part of this network after their internships.

Early in the 2021, Sideshow was active and successful in a couple of ventures. Hester sourced funding and ran an online arts book club which was well attended. The collective hosted a number of popular online Zoom socials for the Graduate Associates to get to know each other better; Drink and Draw, A Manifesto for recent Highland Art Graduates, Art Writing and Zine Making. However, in the latter part of the year Sideshow members' circumstances have changed and activity has waned. So, we held a review meeting together recently to discuss future direction, support and networking needs and whether the role of Circus Sideshow has changed.

The consensus is that Sideshow needs revisioning into a wider network which also embraces the current Graduate Associates now that their programme has finished. It is felt that this will allow more natural connections to develop between artists and form a mutual focus and activity, perhaps in smaller subgroups. It could be more of an 'open format resource'. Work on this is ongoing.

CIRCUS ARTSPACE 2021 PROGRAMME

The notes below illustrate the context within which the interns have been working and highlight the different types of experiences we have delivered in which interns were able to participate as a learning experience.

Programme Statement 2021

In 2021, Circus Artspace wants our programme to track the shifting demographic of the Highlands & Islands and focus on the hidden, forgotten and unheard voices within our community. We want to diverge from Highland cliches and traditional notions of romanticism to reveal unexplored narratives and illustrate the interweaving, international cultures of our place.

Though we are a relatively new artist-run initiative, we have committed to building a public programme of contemporary visual arts. We want to amplify a wider diversity of voices, places and experiences and promote equality, with a focus on non-dominant narratives and communities.

We enjoy bringing people from our broad audience of ages and interests together to create memorable experiences. Our aim is to develop events which are inclusive and build on these highly valued moments of commonality and community.

Online Zoom Events: Feb-March

Circus Artspace have collaborated with a number of artists to support delivery, technical aspects and marketing of online events.

2 February 2021

An informal **'Ubuntu// Daondachd// Humanity'** conversation was hosted around intersectional topics and inclusion matters in the Highlands organised by artist Fadzai Mwakutuya (Afro Art Lab).

7 March 2021

'Celebrating Women & Nature': life drawing for International Women's Day. Presented by Evija Laivina, who set up Art Circle Inverness in November 2019 and was holding regular life drawing sessions until the Covid-19 pandemic hit.

25 March 2021

An Inclusion & Diversity Manifesto for the Arts in Highland as part of **'MANIFESTOS from times of CRISIS'** by artist Rossana Irvine, a participatory public art work in which groups of people create their own collective manifesto.

Circus Zine Fest: 12 &13 June 2021

Led by former intern, Hester Grant, to bring the artform of zines to the Highlands. Zines are homemade publications that originated in the 1930s in the US. She included a performance element, given that zines are so inspired by punk culture, fashion and performance art.

Timepiece: 25 June – 4 July 2021

A sculptural exhibition, originally planned for May 2020, by local artist Ian Kane. Viewing Highland life through village and community, past and present, *Timepiece* also looked forward to the future with global concerns.

NOTICE: October 2021

Working with three commissioned artists and three community interest groups, this project created three visual interventions responding to the theme of 'Celebrating the Cultures and Identities of our Place'. These were installed on billboard sites across Inverness city centre and culminated in an artist-led walk as the launch event.

15 December 2021