

Confidential

Briefing note: The Lux Centre and ACE

Value

Argument as to the worth of what The Lux Centre actually *does* may be incidental to how we allow it to do so, but suffice to state here that its strategic importance is not relative, it is absolute.

Artists' moving image film and digital practice has been riding a wave in recent years, as high profile evidenced in Turner Prize nominations and winners (Jane and Louise Wilson, Steve McQueen, Isaac Julien), and feature film successes (Patrick Keiller, Andrew Kotting and John Maybury). The Lux Centre has enabled and promoted the careers of many of the leading artists in the field. It is an international flagship: a recognised exemplar of integrated function and practice, uniquely configured, with production informing programme, and programme itself a site for development and research, for artists and audience alike. The catalogue holdings are unrivalled internationally and in effect constitute the National Collection of artists' cinema and video.

Whatever the outcome of the Lux bid to the Recovery Programme, it should be inconceivable to us that the Arts Council would preside over the utter cessation of Lux's operation.

Organisation

The organisations which merged to become The Lux - London Filmmakers' Co-op (1966) and London Electronic Arts (1976) - both began as artists' led collectives.

By the late 1980s, the differences in practice represented by the two organisations all but disappeared. Artists working with the moving image did so across media, in a variety of exhibition format and venue, including the internet. It became increasingly counterproductive that responsibilities, most particularly for distribution, were split between two organisations.

Responsibilities

LFMCo-op and LEA, although national artists' organisations, were never Arts Council clients: they were funded by the British Film Institute and Greater London Arts and later, London Film and Video Development Agency.

This anomaly had consequences: the Arts Council is national lead body with responsibility for artists' moving image, yet the main national artists' film and video organisations have not been AC clients. The BFI was reluctant to relinquish its interests, and it is unfortunate that the Arts Council did not argue often or strongly enough for the situation to be rectified; when the organisations protested their difficulties, the response from the Arts Council was simply to pass the buck.

By the mid 1990s the LFMCo-op building in Gloucester Avenue was literally falling down – screenings had to be abandoned as chunks of the ceiling rained down on audiences. The BFI and LFVDA developed plans for moving both organisations to new premises and secured a developer partner.

When the Lottery was introduced, the Hoxton Square project became one of the first recipients of ACE Lottery Capital finance. And one of its victims.

The BFI forced the project through, pushing the LFMCo-op and LEA into the building as two separate organisations, with separate offices, IT systems, etc. Merger, a condition of an ACE Contingency grant in 1999, was similarly forced at speed, with little consideration as to the implications.

The Lux Centre is in critical condition; operational problems have solutions, but the real hurdle is the building, rent, etc. Ownership of the new building was given to the developer, and the commercial rent levels being imposed are a seemingly insurmountable obstacle to Lux achieving its potential in the building built for it. With hindsight, it's clear that whatever checks and balances ACE had in place to monitor its massive investment were not sufficient, and even without answering all the questions as to how the Lux Centre found itself up this creek, paddle-less, one thing is clear: the Arts Council helped put them there.

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