

Who's doing the washing up?



Re—
Imagine
Europe

Who's doing the washing up? was a Re-Imagine Europe programme of institutional interventions at Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen, Norway (2018) and Lighthouse, Brighton, UK (2019). Curator Eva Rowson assembled a report of the programme with contributions from the artists, participants and arts institutions that were involved: Jordi Ferreiro, Johanne Hauge Gjerland, Linnea Halveg, Lisa Holmås, Lara Antoine, Bobby Brown, Emma Wickham, Connor Clark, Jamila Prowse, Alli Beddoes and Matt Weston. For the purpose of this publication, Sandra Trienekens made a selection from this report to give an insight into the intentions of the programme, the experiences of the participants, the process and the reflections that resulted from it.

The full report *Who's doing the washing up?* can be found at: https://re-imagine-europe.eu/resources_item/whos-doing-the-washing-up/

Cover Photo
Takeover: *Inventing Structures* with Jordi Ferreiro, Bergen Kunsthall, 2018



Communal Lunches, Lighthouse Brighton, 2019

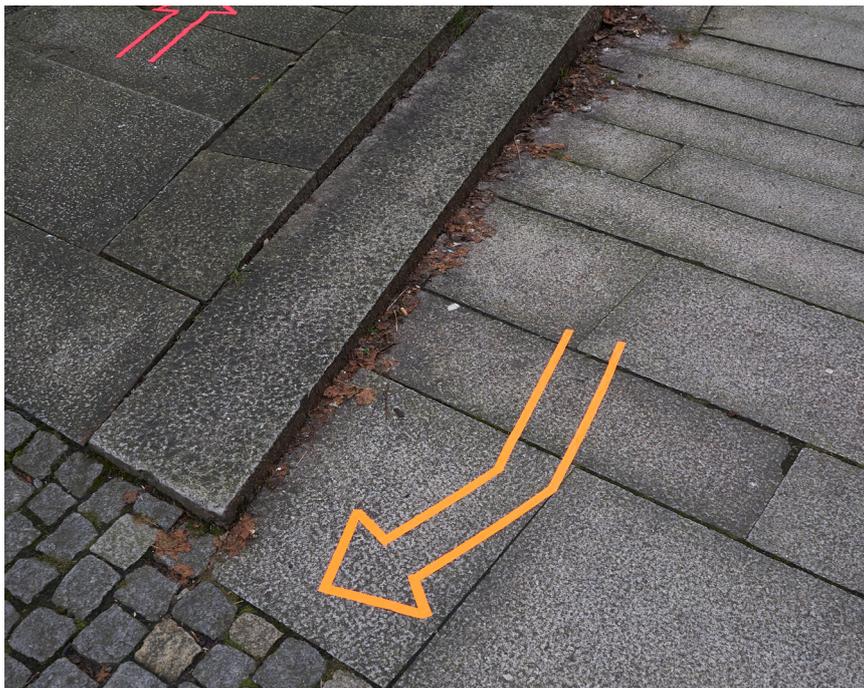
With the programme *Who's doing the washing up?*, curated by Eva Rowson, Bergen Kunsthall and Lighthouse set out to explore questions such as: If we could rethink our organisation what would it look and feel like if all the workers had a voice in how the activities, organisations, buildings are re-imagined, and then sustained, on an everyday, practical, in-use basis? Could change be enacted and sustained with the input of everyone who would ultimately be making it happen practically: Who cleans up afterwards? For Bergen Kunsthall and Lighthouse *Who's doing the washing up?* was an earnest attempt to re-imagine how they are organised, how they use their buildings, work with people, use budgets, develop programme activities and administer decisions, and also actually to change the infrastructures they work in, in order to not reproduce old models, narratives and values under a veil of innovation or hospitality.

As part of the *Who's doing the washing up?* programme Eva Rowson commissioned Barcelona-based artist and educator Jordi Ferreiro to develop two interventions, one at Bergen Kunsthall and one at Lighthouse in Brighton. At Bergen Kunsthall, Ferreiro collaborated in August and November 2018 with Siv Bryn, Linnea Halveg, Lisa Holmås

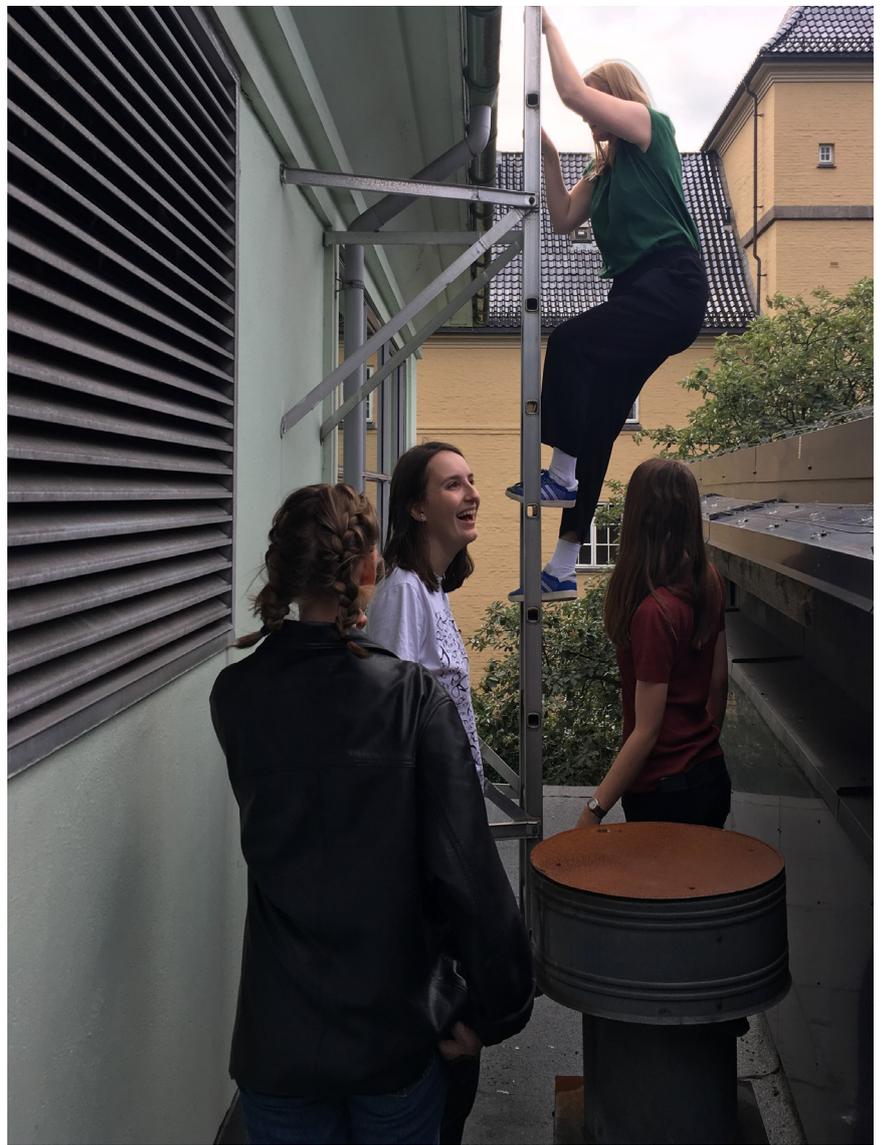
and Johanne Hauge Gjerland and other members of *Unge Kunstkjennere* (UKK) to explore how an arts organisation can accommodate self-directed areas that give space to different voices and actions. The UKK is the young people's association at Bergen Kunsthall, who meet regularly with an aim to make contemporary art more accessible to their peers and to give young people their own voice in contemporary art. In a series of exploratory meetings and activities, they planned and enacted a one-day takeover of Bergen Kunsthall to explore specific issues of accessibility, and ended up focusing on physical accessibility, and the main entrance of the building: Who is the Kunsthall really made for if the main entrance only has stairs?

In July 2019 Jordi Ferreiro co-hosted a week of communal lunches at Lighthouse as a follow-up. With guest lunch-hosts he asked what cultural organisations need to do if they genuinely want to become inclusive of different perspectives. The lunches were developed with Matt Weston from Brighton-based agency Spacemakers, and catered by Lalibela Ethiopian Kitchen, Brighton Cauldron, and Lerato Foods. The invited curators, artists and producers working in Brighton and beyond included Ben Messih, Lara Antoine, Boudicca, Chanel Stephens, Saygal Yusuf, Jamila Prowse and Amrita Dhallu. The *Who's doing the washing up?* programme title extended in Brighton to '*– and where's the sink?*' in response to Lighthouse's current aims to re-design the building to become more open and visible from the outside, and to acquire more appropriately designed spaces for the diverse activities, groups and tenants they host in the building.

Both interventions involved collaborations with workers and associates of Bergen Kunsthall and Lighthouse who are not usually involved in core curatorial or programming decisions or activities: the youth group, the operations teams and the tenants. Specifically, these two projects investigated the inner workings of the organisations to try to propose some new ways of reconfiguring existing organisational and architectural structures that would include new uses, voices and challenges.



Takeover: *Inventing Structures* with Jordi Ferreiro, Bergen Kunsthall, 2018



Unge kunstkjennere exploring Bergen Kunsthall from top to bottom, workshop with Jordi Ferreiro, 2018

A shared exploration of openness and accessibility

Jordi Ferreiro

'From my perspective, a good institution involves a very complex creation process to generate a new structure of limitations, needs and opportunities in a respectful way, without eliminating previous structures and dynamics but repositioning them or turning them around. I think it's much easier to create something totally new and overwrite what was previously there, but it's certainly not good practice. That is why we, already before *Who's doing the washing up?*, engaged in discussions on the concept of "la musea" – as a kind of correction of the actual Spanish word for museum "el museo" – to imagine an institution that follows transfeminist policies. That is, an institution not governed by hierarchical regimes that perpetuate infrastructures from economic, military or colonial spheres (which many of us found ourselves working in at the time), but instead one that embraces horizontality and cooperative and collaborative ways of working that recognise and equally value all the different work tasks and people involved. To understand

management, coordination or production, as an artistic practice is a positioning to which I also feel very close. In fact, I always talk about the artist as a “hoster” who organises the table or a “master” of the board game, roles that organise a situation so that the others take the reins. To understand the role of the artist as an organiser is to escape the romantic idea of the “creator-genius”, but how to do it when you arrive into an unfamiliar context on a parachute for only a few weeks? Here the guiding concept became “making a *flan* [a Spanish custard desert] without knowing the mould”, meaning that you have to create something but you don’t have a structure to do it, so it needs time to give it a shape, and sometimes it’s not the shape you expected, and that turns into a really interesting shape, or into many shapes which surprise you, serendipities from which you learn. Like at Bergen Kunsthall it was also extremely serendipitous to discover that the Norwegian Blind Association shares the same building as the Kunsthall... I think in that moment our project started to take shape, and we knew that was a very special shape. Both the notions of “la musea” and “making a flan without knowing the mould’ are collective reflections about the social importance of cultural institutions, and how these institutions consider citizenship. Who gets to participate in their culture, who gets excluded, what are the edges and boundaries of the institution’s shape?’

Linnea Halveg, Lisa Holmås & Johanne Hauge Gjerland

Members of Bergen Kunsthall’s UKK, actively involved in the *Washing Up* and the one-day takeover

‘The first thing we did was to deconstruct the organisation and look at it from every corner by visiting the roof and the basement, the sound engineer, the backstage spaces and the woodworking room where the technicians work with artists to build what they need for the exhibitions and installations. And we ate lots of snacks! We also visited the Blind Association, because they rent part of the Kunsthall for their offices and meeting/event space. The people who are working there talked to us about different forms of blindness and visual impairments and different tools and aids people with a visual impairment use as support. We also talked about what’s important to remember when working with blind people and how society is or isn’t accessible to blind people – a lot of things you don’t think about when you’re not blind. Physical accessibility quickly became our focus after this. Back at the Kunsthall, we made a giant map of the things we had learnt and we looked at how we could connect these things in a takeover of the Kunsthall in some way. The main entrance of Bergen Kunsthall is not accessible for those with a disability, or those not able to carry a stroller up the stairs; they will need to use the side entrance, but only few people know its there. When Jordi came back in November, we decided that during the take-over, we would close the front entrance to the Kunsthall and make the ramped door at the side of the building the main entrance for the day. There we took away the dust, put down carpets and made it nice place to come into and re-did the signage so people would understand how to get into the building. Since the exhibitions were closed that day, most of the people were coming to Landmark to eat and there were a lot of families with small children. We thought that the side-entrance would only make the Kunsthall more accessible for people in wheelchairs, but it turned that the parents with small children, prams and pushchairs were grateful for the ramped entrance too. We invited the people into our gallery space where we had maps for people to write down their thoughts on accessibility. We talked with them about how accessible the Kunsthall is, how it’s designed, and who for, and how they would change the design of the Kunsthall if they could. The children were playing in the galleries

and the whole space had a different, social feel during the day. During Jordi's first visit in August, we started the workshop by making a giant plastic "building" together inside the Kunsthall, using thin plastic sheets and tape. It was a way to design a building together which could move and change. Once we'd made the structure, with different rooms, we used an electric fan to inflate it and it was big enough for us to sit inside. We did a similar thing on the takeover day – which the children thought was wonderful – and projected a picture of the Kunsthall on the outside surface to suggest a dynamic potential. By closing the main entrance, we made a lot of people think about the access to the Kunsthall and who is actually included in this "main" in the "main entrance" – and who actually is instantly marginalized from the main because they can't use the main entrance. The most obvious outcome from the takeover was making visible the lack of accessibility for wheelchair users and the difficult colours in the Kunsthall for those with reduced sight. This is not something Bergen Kunsthall can solve easily in the architecture since the building is protected as Norwegian heritage. But what our conversations also demonstrated is that many people felt that art galleries are not meant or available for everyone, because the idea and feeling tied to the gallery stereotypically belong to a specific group of people. When we asked for a solution to this, people often responded that they wanted an inviting space where they could just be, meet up. Sounds simple enough but the question then becomes: How exactly can a gallery become a place people just want to meet and stay in without losing focus on its main goal: presenting art?'

Lara Antoine

Speaker at one of the communal lunches during Ferreiro's residency at Lighthouse, former participant in Lighthouse's Viral programme, and independent video maker, writer, founder and editor of online media platform AVRA

'During the lunches we explored how we can use Lighthouse as a welcoming space for the local community both in-house and beyond. I was intrigued when I heard all of the doors would be open throughout the course of the week, because Lighthouse is easy to walk past, not many people know about it or where it is. So, I was interested to find out what that looked like and how the public would react as they walked past. With the tenants we had lunch together and we spoke about potential possibilities that could improve the physical state of the building. From dropping the main wall back to addressing the question of the effect of the layout of the room on the intimacy and comfort for the audiences we invite into our spaces. We spoke a lot about "navigating (hostile) institutions" by focusing on issues around race and young people. What stood out for me were the ideas around programmes for young people aimed at keeping them involved in the long-term, rather than using them for a short time with little to no pay before replacing them. Our talks during the week also shone some light on other ways of being open than those that necessarily mean having the front door wide open all the time. We talked about the impact of having a closed-door space for feminist women, gender non-binary, lesbian and queer-identified people in the Devil's Dyke Network. To be open means more than just opening the doors. It means being there for young people, helping them realise their potential rather than just teaching them. It means being an organisation that listens and supports communities who seem to have been overlooked. Lighthouse is already good in providing a professional community space that supports young creatives outside the music industry. Brighton is very music-focused, so as an artist, especially a young artist, it's not easy to find a space for you to be welcomed in. It's even more difficult if you aren't at university. So, it would be a great place for young

people to try new ideas, host workshops and meet like-minded people (all of which Viral did) even if it's just a short-term or one-off. For people who are into film, it would be useful to have a space to screen and reflect on their latest films. Or have a 3-day pop-up residency for a young emerging artist. It would be great to have a space as a testing ground for our ideas. However, that comes with a potential risk in terms of finances and resources. These are the doors that seem to be closed for young people in Brighton. There are several “takeaways” from the conversations, such as “work *with* people not *for* people”, having more public moments leads to more visibility, knowing the right language improves the way in which people perceive you, listen to the people you wish to reach, provide the infrastructure to accommodate ways to move forward, and increase the openness of the physical space – without forgetting that being open can mean having a space with a closed door!’

Emma Wickham

Head of operations at Lighthouse

‘What came from asking the question “who’s doing the washing up? And where’s the sink?” is a change in vibe within the team through asking the question over a period of time and it seeping in and the question being championed by Eva. It led to a great feeling of pride in our work and a boost to team moral. Through asking the question, we thought about and respected ours and others’ everyday work tasks and every person that goes in to making that task happen... and this came over time. This has been a very positive change and our language around our work tasks has definitely changed since. Talking about certain tasks as boring or a chore is now a rarity. It really helps towards feeling you are part of something worthwhile and you are all working together toward a positive goal – and that’s priceless really. What also struck me was how this programme was different in that it was asking questions not only from within but out loud to the public, about how we are working or how we are feeling and how we would like to improve or change. And in that way, it felt inclusive and honest.’

Eva Rowson

‘At a time of constantly hearing “opening up” as a methodology for arts organisations to become more inclusive, accessible, diverse and welcoming of “hard to reach” audiences, I found Jamila was asking different questions during the lunch session she co-hosted with Amrita: Who is deciding what this opening up looks like and for whom? Why does the conversation about how to be more accessible always feel like the answers are already written before the questions are even asked? And does anyone in these institutions actually really care or want to take responsibility for the difficult conversations and organisational (and personal) self-reflections, which come from genuinely changing the way we think about access and inclusivity? Jamila and Amrita worked through different constellations of care they had personally experienced to propose strategies of caring for collaborators, friends, other workers, and to look after our own mental health when we start asking the questions in our institutions which no one else is asking. That was inspiring. That is the kind of questioning that should also stretch beyond the re-imagining, after the revolutionary moment has happened: Who’s doing the washing up *now*?’



Unge kunstkjennere, workshop with Jordi Ferreiro, Bergen Kunsthall, 2018

Who is doing the washing up now? And tomorrow?

Jordi Ferreiro pointed out that real transformation in a project of one, three or even twelve months is unlikely. A true transformation of imagination will only happen over an extended period. In his experience, effecting real re-imagining and real change in institutional dynamics requires making space for long-term changes. Actions that only last a few days, after which the organisation quickly returns to its usual dynamics, are not enough. What artists, educators and cultural agents in general can do is submit proposals for other ways of working. Now at Bergen Kunsthall all workers involved in an exhibition are acknowledged in the exhibition credits. Naming and acknowledging every worker equally in a space that was previously reserved for full-time staff or curators, has made a difference for the Kunsthall in 're-imagining' the acknowledgement of all the work involved. It's a promising beginning for how these acknowledgments could also probe and inspire further thinking of who has internal agency, who gets paid what and on what kind of contracts. Bergen Kunsthall is currently commissioning re-design work for its wheelchair-unfriendly front entrance, in conversation with disability consultants.

At Lighthouse, the team are now working on developing their public signage for access around the building, and on an accessibility document that further defines and implements what being a safe, inclusive space entails. The programme team has taken on a share of operational work such as sitting at the reception desk. Inspired by the communal lunches during Jordi Ferreiro's week, Lighthouse continues the lunches with tenants and local catering charities to create social meeting spaces for all tenants, and now also organise catering for their room hires through local food charities.

What is interesting in Jordi Ferreiro's interventions in Bergen Kunsthall and Lighthouse is how they draw our attention to the interrelations between architectural, physical accessibility and the wider issue of inclusion. During the interventions, it became manifest that concepts such as inclusion, openness, accessibility and hospitality have an architectural, physical element, but are in essence cultural challenges. It's easy to employ an architect or designer to fix the obvious things, such as knocking down a wall to create more openness, or decorating a room to make it appear more hospitable, but one might still not be dealing with the roots of the problem. The core question remains: what do institutions have to do to open up culturally. How do they make sure that conversations with partners, artists and audiences, and the shared re-imaginings that emerge from those, become actions as well as part of the institution's overall strategy? How do they keep listening to what is needed? What information needs to be gathered from feedback initiatives? How can they continue to learn from 'opening the door'? The re-imagining at Lighthouse made it clear that an organisation's accessibility is about open-ness as public-ness, and anti-racism,¹ as well as about providing for closed and semi-closed activities and spaces, as public spaces may quickly become only public for some people. Openness can thus also mean having closed-off spaces to enable organisations and groups other than the usual to have a space where they can work and develop their ideas. *Who's doing the washing up?* led those involved to experience that, for all the outreach work about bringing in audiences, art organisations also need to think about the people working for them. 'Reaching in' is just as important as 'reaching out'. In both, the ability to listen and the possibility to be actively involved proved to be key.

¹ <https://lighthouse.org.uk/anti-racism-plan>

BIOGRAPHIES

Eva Rowson (UK) is Managing Director of Bergen Kjøtt, a production house and cultural venue in Bergen, Norway. Her work is organised around hosting, collaboration and organisational practices – focusing on how the different types of work involved are valued, and with what consequences. This thinking is at the core of long-term collaborative projects including the project space 38b, co-run from her living room in London, and Como imaginar una musea?

Jordi Ferreiro (ES) is an artist and educator whose projects use institutional mediation, performative participation, play and experimental educational movements to interfere in the relations between institutions, art and audiences with an aim of creating new strategies that we can use on a macroscale outside the art world. His research into organisational models has developed recently through the collaborative project Como imaginar una musea?

Lara Antoine (UK) is an independent video maker, writer, founder and editor of online media platform AVRA.

Linnea Halveg, Lisa Holmås & Johanne Hauge Gjerland (NO) are members of Bergen Kunsthall's UKK.

Emma Wickham (UK) is head of operations at Lighthouse.

CONTEXT

This article is part of the *Re-Imagine Europe* publication. The publication collects articles, essays, interviews and reports about audience engagement for interdisciplinary arts organisations. It aims to share knowledge gained throughout the *Re-Imagine Europe* project with professionals in the cultural sector who would like to gain a deeper insight in audience development and capacity building.

Re-Imagine Europe (2017-2021) is a four-year project of ten cultural organizations from across Europe, responding to the current social and political challenges. With a programme of residencies, commissions, symposia and workshops, the project partners stimulate both artistic production and audience development. They experiment with new ways of reaching out to their audiences, motivated by the ambition to develop a broader and more engaging approach to audience development and capacity building.

COLOPHON

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