

And still, we move

A reflection on Pier Residencies at Lighthouse



Re—
Imagine
Europe

How can an arts organisation do more to carve out space for specific community groups and individuals who identify as coming from marginalised backgrounds? The Pier Residency at Lighthouse was an experiment to carve out such a space. This text is a journal that has been written in collaboration with the artists that took part in the residency, as well as artists working with Lighthouse as a result of the call, and the Lighthouse team and trustees. With contributions by Elijah, Amaal Said, Munotida Chinyanga, Erin James, Elsa Monteith, Sian Habel-Aili, and Simone Carty.

How can artists get the chance to execute big ideas if you haven't been given the chance to execute small ones? Residencies are supported spaces to that next step. – Elijah

Cover Photo
Munotida Chinyanga



Top line, left to right: Sian Habell-Aili, Alli Beddoes, Elsa Monteith. Bottom line, left to right: Erin James, Munotida Chinyanga, Elijah

In the spring of 2020, the uprising and strength of the Black Lives Matter Movement took hold of people's attention across the globe. Protests and tireless campaigns shone a spotlight on racism and racial violence in ways we have not seen in this generation.

It is nearly a year since Lighthouse released the Anti-Racist action plan to begin work on adapting methods in which the organisation operates and address how we work to be more inclusive. These issues are by no means new. But what is new is the attention and the space that has informed everyone to address the language and systems played out in cultural institutions. As a cultural organisation, we offer a public service. Therefore we should be accountable to everyone, and we should work continuously to provide space in these institutions that are genuinely safe.

It is an understatement to say that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the cultural and creative industries across the world. Yet amongst the devastation, there is a renewed recognition of the effects and the power that art and culture can have on society. Now, more than ever, we must take this as our chance to address and dismantle the things that do not work for everyone.

It is important to articulate that Lighthouse is a predominantly white, cis-gender and able-bodied organisation. However, the team and the board have a deep-rooted belief that what we do will have a more significant impact if our charity reflects the city and the sector in which we work to bring different voices and experiences to the team and programme. We recognise the need to do more, to make real and permanent changes in the organisation.

Last year, we worked as a team alongside the Board of Trustees to set out an Anti-Racist Action Plan. In amongst all the flurry of statements of solidarity and support from other organisations, we committed ourselves as a team to dismantle systemic inequality and to build a fairer cultural sector for the future – to do this, action was needed and urgently. There are key points in the action plan which held long and short term targets. We addressed the language used, the occupancy of the building, our team and recruitment and our programme. As a charity and arts organisation, our mission is to increase the diversity of arts leaders and programming by supporting artists, producers and curators to develop their practice, but recognise the need to do more. To prioritise and drive change for our cultural landscape.

This work started immediately; thanks to our commitment to *Re-Imagine Europe* commissions and residencies remaining, we were able to implement the space and funds for Black creators. We took the pandemic as an opportunity to create *Pier – Residencies for Black Artists*, a three-week collaborative ‘artist residency at home’ with an £800 bursary (per person) that was awarded to three Black¹ artists/creatives. The opportunity was for artists, practitioners, producers, and technologists to expand their practice, research, and develop ideas and methodologies with remote support from the Lighthouse team and our co-conspirators. The outcome of the residencies are now being developed to inform commissions of new work in 2021.

This residency programme was initiated to be a home-based opportunity to connect with the creative community and develop artistic projects to acknowledge that many people experienced barriers to participation before the Covid-19 pandemic and continue to be affected by isolation stemming from structural inequalities. We particularly welcomed applications from disabled artists who might benefit from working remotely/flexibly.

The response to the call-out was extensive, with over fifty artists from all over the world putting their work forward. We used the usual platforms to promote the opportunity, which helped widen the reach, and artists who had never encountered Lighthouse before made applications.

The selection process was carried out with Elijah and Lighthouse representatives Alli Beddoes and Sian Habell-Aili. They met with ten artists to discuss their practice and how they’d use their residency time. In the end they selected Amaal Said, Simone Carty, and Munotida Chinyanga.

¹ Following discussions with our Black peers and collaborators together with our reading and research, we define black as African or Caribbean descent. This opportunity was for anyone whose heritage includes African or Caribbean descent.

LIGHTHOUSE

OPEN CALL: PIER - A RESIDENCY TO COLLABORATE + CONNECT

As part of our Re-Imagine Europe programme, Lighthouse has developed a 'residency at home' series that we are awarding support for three black artists.

This is an opportunity for artists, practitioners, producers and technologists to expand their practice, research and develop ideas and methodologies.

We particularly welcome applications from disabled, queer and non-binary artists.

We would like the outcome of this residency to inform a commission of new work in 2021.

Artist fee (per artist): £800
Deadline: 24th July 2020

The poster features a dark background with a blurred image of a person's face in the lower right corner. The main title is 'Pier-Residency for Black Artists' in a large, white, serif font. A circular badge in the top right corner contains the text 'awards £800 artist bursary + up to £500 budget'. Below the title, it says 'OPEN CALL for proposals to develop new work. We are looking for:' followed by a bulleted list of categories: 'VISUAL ARTISTS (e.g. painting, sculpture, installation, dance, performance, photography, moving image, graphic design)', 'MUSIC/SOUND COMPOSERS (e.g. DJ, music producer, composer, sound artist, recording/performing artist)', and 'DOCUMENTARY PRACTITIONERS (e.g. writer, critic, photographer, filmmaker, designer, animator)'. At the bottom, it says '& MORE! Apply now via lighthouse.org.uk/opportunities'. The 'Lighthouse' logo is at the bottom center, with the same two logos from the previous block below it.

Open Call – Residency at Home for Black artists

Having worked at Lighthouse as Associate Artistic Director from 2017 – 2018, Elijah brought knowledge and experience of working from, with and in response to Lighthouse and the programme. He referred to his role as a bridge between artist and organisation, and was clear that everyone that took time to apply for the opportunity should have the time for one-to-one feedback. Elijah recalls the reduced capacity of the Lighthouse team, so taking on the 'people part' freed up the programme team to support the artists during the residency. 'It's not possible, in any time, never mind a pandemic, to support people and deliver the programme AND feedback to the artists and talk through the sensitive things. We knew we wouldn't get things 100% right and that this opportunity didn't come from a place of perfection, so working through things in public was a risk but one that adapted and responded.'

Erin James, a Lighthouse Young Creatives alumni and a photographer, designer and editor based in Brighton, runs Tough Cookie, a business and magazine edition that focuses on campaigning for Black rights. She was invited to document the artists on their residency and says: 'It was refreshing to see action at that time while other organisations were making statements. The actual investment in Black people was (and is) more powerful than words. This residency that carved out a specific space for Black creators made a step to normalise calling for Black artists. It was a shift and one that needs to continue if we are to make any difference.'

Open Calls are a process that Lighthouse has worked with many times, but we are conscious that this is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, as an organisation, we receive applications from artists worldwide and artists we might not encounter in our

research and development. On the other hand, open calls require labour and energy. There is inevitable collateral damage where some artists are unsuccessful in their application and it can quickly become the opposite of an Open Call, and the door is firmly closed.

Lighthouse is keen to find a balance needed to reduce the number of open calls for projects and work with the talent that we would like to support. Where open calls feel like the best-suited approach, we would like to ensure there are opportunities extended to all applicants, beyond the primary offer (exchange sessions, invitations to workshops, sharing funding opportunities, feedback). Elsa Monteith, a Lighthouse Young Creatives alumni who is an artist, writer and curator, observes that Open Calls have a value in that a creative practice changes or adapts over time and that they do have a place in the sector. We continue to ponder on how to keep the door open for opportunity and reduce the labour of constant applications.



Amaal Said

Amaal Said is a Danish-born Somali photographer, and poet, based in London, whose work is concerned with storytelling and how best she can connect with people to document their stories. She stated: 'I want to work on a poetry and photography project about mental health and intergenerational trauma and what it's like not having the language for it in my family. The work will concern family in both Kenya and United Kingdom and hopes to capture a conversation that occurs across this distance about mental health. I want to work on 3-4 poems about my own experience and the experiences of my family members and to also work on photographing them.'



Simone Carty

Simone Carty is a 28 year old music producer, sound designer & filmmaker. She stated: 'I wish to craft a self-produced 3 track EP utilising my skills with film and sound design to tell a story about my personal journey towards self-love. The sound design and visuals will be entwined with songs performed by me. The sounds will be a mix of abstract, dreamy and ethereal sound bites with foley. The visuals, as well as creating a sensorial experience through merging sound and visuals together, will also depict the lyrical storyline of each song and journal entry. All art forms will work with each other and be a fluid performance.'

Munotida Chinyanga is an anti-disciplinary practitioner creating work through direction, sound design and international collaboration. Her practise explores how theatre, performance and sound art can facilitate the making or bringing together of a community, especially in environments that do not have a constant connection to the arts. She stated: 'I want to investigate ways in which digital technology, social media and sound can support cross-cultural dialogue and the making of new communities, right from your computer across Europe. How can we facilitate conversation between strangers? I propose creating interactive performance that takes place on an online platform, in which I facilitate conversations and dialogues between strangers using a similar structure to that of Netflix show *Love is Blind*. However this is not with the purpose to find love but to connect and share with people you may not encounter with in your everyday. This will experiment with digital technology, and headphone art.'

Reflection

Amaal Said: 'The Lighthouse residency changed the direction of my work in the best possible way. It came at a time when I needed it the most. I didn't have the language to describe the project and the time to sit down and do the work. The three-week residency allowed me that time. I knew I wanted to do something about mental health and family archiving, but the conversations I had with others and the reading I did guided me towards developing greater understanding and empathy.'

Amaal Said: 'What I thought would be an exercise in going back to the archive and filling in what I deemed missing, stories and other archive materials, turned into my interpretation of what was missing through poetry. I didn't have to find proof or evidence. My testimony of the stories that had been passed down felt enough for the project. It wasn't only about the family photo album and going back to it, but the ritual itself of bringing it out and talking through family memories together. The guidance of the Lighthouse team was a blessing. Knowing I had the support whenever I needed it gave me confidence. I never felt alone. Taking the project further is a huge aim. The residency gave me the most amazing start and I'm excited to keep doing the reading, continuing the conversation with people about how they document themselves and their families and writing even more poems about the stories that have been passed down but haven't been recorded yet.'

Munotida Chinyanga: 'The residency gave me the time and space to access my creativity during a time when it was not even something I could consider. And because it was at home, it allowed me to find ways and engage with behaviours to form a creative space at home. Because most of my work before lockdown required to travel, and so my inspirations came from different communities and the countries I visited, I found it hard to get inspired. Still, this residency allowed me to reform my space and find that balance. I have met artists and mentors who have inspired me, challenged my creative practice, and introduced me to other contemporary methods. Not to mention the fee – to be paid to research and think is a privilege, and I am grateful. The budget given has also allowed me to up-skill myself with the equipment purchased, which has led to so many other personal creative achievements. Even though my research idea may not have gone to plan or become what I wanted it to be, I think it is important to mention that the broader effects of being a part of this residency have been virtual, if not pivotal. From managing my practice, managing and transforming my creative space, to connecting and exchanging practices and to finding ways I can see small creative personal challenges from home.'

Elijah: 'The Pier Residency process helped me to work out where to put my energy. Over the years, I have been in positions in organisations where I can support people to do work, which has brought a privilege that I am committed to directing in positive ways. I have worked with organisations and institutions beyond my role in music, and I could do that. This project has helped me think through the balance of that and how that would play out in busier times. I don't believe that this work can be down to charities and organisations to do this and that individuals in a privileged position need to seek out ways to support too.'



Munotida Chinyanga

Elsa Monteith: ‘For everybody to feel like they belong in this space, we must choose to make art accessible and approachable. Whilst it can feel like you have to use “industry” words and vocabulary to be taken seriously in the art world, it’s important to use language that everybody can understand and relate to. So again, it comes back to representation, accessibility, support, and inclusion. We must platform the marginalised voices in our community and listen to those who have been doing the work without recognition. I spoke to an artist about another project I was working on with Lighthouse. She said there should be “nothing about us, without us”, a sentiment to carry forward when we talk about the future of the residency programme and callouts in general.’

Erin James: ‘The callouts for opportunities and jobs across the sector tend to mention how they want to support minorities within minorities. While the Pier Residency was for Black creatives, there was also a note that this included disabled and queer Black artists – this is good, but there need to be clear reasons for addressing distrust and the idea of being tokenistic. It is essential to be open and give considered reasons for specific ideas

and use of language. These ideas and dialogues are constantly shifting, so it is noticed when paragraphs are lifted from previous opportunities and added in, seemingly, as an afterthought.'

Going forward

The Pier Residency format was experimentation into how an arts organisation can do more to carve out space for specific community groups and individuals who identify as coming from marginalised backgrounds. We were successful in doing that and can see that other spaces are also bringing similar models to their programme. We have learned much from the process and intend to replicate it as an opportunity annually.

Munotida talked about the importance of positioning the interview as a conversation with a balance of formalities and space to meander through thoughts. She says it was one of her favourite interviews to date and allowed her space to talk through her ideas without an established hierarchy. Elsa and Erin, as alumni of the Lighthouse Young Creatives programme, note how Lighthouse aims to offer a horizontal and non-transactional environment which enables artists to build ongoing relationships and trust with an organisation that can lead to continuous collaborations as the individuals grow and develop their practise.

Through the assessment of the applications, we noted strong connections with the artist's works and with people who had not met before. We set up three online networking sessions for all the artists who applied to meet each other and talk about their work. This sense of community was strong, artists from Ghana, the US, Egypt, the UK and beyond exchanged ideas, methodologies, encouragement and ways of coping and thriving creatively through the pandemic. It's something we wish to develop in terms of using the Lighthouse platform to connect people and present their work in more ways. The Lighthouse Communal Lunches curated by Eva Rowson as part of the *Re-Imagine Europe* programme were noted as the most powerful way to bring people together. In times outside of the pandemic restrictions this is a format that we'd bring to the Open Call structure where artists can meet and not be asked questions for a feedback form, but one that is natural and comes with ease.

And still, we move

Change is difficult, but it is possible – it requires the privileged to both give something back but also give something up.

How do we continue the learning and listening with other organisations in the sector and keep the attention and energy that still drives these changes?

How do we keep the mission at Lighthouse going beyond the people here now driving forward with this work?

How does this learning carry on through the process rather than being driven by the burning passion inside individuals?

How can other organisations and individuals adapt similar ways of working to address the vital need for change?

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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