

Top tips for applying for commissions, residencies and callouts with Axis and Open Eye Gallery

This session was an in conversation with arts organisations Axis and Open Eye Gallery. As this session was a discussion Metal have pulled together their own notes from the session as a resource.

About Axis:

Axis is an independent charity, they are committed to providing a platform to support artists and profile what they do. Through a determination to create the space artists need, their programme comprises a range of activities:

Reflecting the artists' voice is integral to emerging developments in contemporary art, across assorted contexts. They present new aspects and forms of artistic expression to local, national and international audiences.

Supporting artists: insurance, networks, space, opportunities, R&D awards, profiling, advice, mentoring - enabling artists to be artists

Their members influence and inform all of their activities and developments. By shifting from the gallery-led system of spectatorship to one that begins with the artist.

Harlan: is program producer for Axis, specifically looking after their commissions and graduate programmes. He's also an artist, Curator, Event organiser and Film-maker.

About Open Eye Gallery:

Open Eye are constantly rethinking what a gallery can be. They produce exhibitions, long-term collaborative projects, publications, festivals, and university courses — locally and worldwide. Open Eye proactively take risks to spark crucial conversations and enable creative expression.

Open Eye are taking a lead on socially engaged photography nationally. Bringing different voices, photographers and communities together, they establish projects where the collaborative process is just as important as the final product. As much as possible, their staff, space, online channels and networks are open and free for people to use.

Sarah has over 30 years' experience in the arts. Currently Executive Director of Open Eye Gallery, Liverpool, Co-Chair of Culture Forum North and on the advisory board of Hardman House. Previous history includes leading the Centre for Chinese Contemporary Art, Manchester, and Head of Visual Arts, Arts Council NW, amongst other roles. Sarah began her career as a London-based practicing artist, lecturing at the Slade School of Art and Chelsea College of Art and Design.

About Metal New Artist Network :

Since July 2020, Metal have hosted a digital programme of support for early-career artists, those in their first few years of defining themselves as an artist. The programme consists of artist-led training sessions, creative workshops, networking and sharing opportunities. Though this programme welcomes emerging artists from across the UK and overseas, we are particularly interested in how we can help early-career artists who live or work in our host cities of Liverpool, Peterborough and Southend on Sea. You can find out more about the network here:

<https://www.metalculture.com/projects/metal-new-artist-network/>

Top Tips

Is the commission, residency or call out right for you?

- When you apply for something, have a good look at the brief and think about is it the right thing for you? Do you want to apply because you want those people to know what you do and who you are? Even months later they might remember you and think you are a good fit for a future project.

- Really think about what you put in that application, focus on what the people (asking the brief) want. Look at the organisations website and see what they do and how they do it – who is their work benefiting? What are they (the organisation) trying to do in the world? Tailor that application to them.

Rejection as part of your practice

- Something they never tell you at art school is you could still be right for something but not get through. Rejection is part of the practice as an artist. Start to see putting applications in as part of your practice – find a positive way of coping with application rejections.
- It's not always about the quality of your work and that what you're doing doesn't have value. It's just sometimes means the call out is targeted at specific voices and less a question of your work being good enough and more about certain voices wanted / needing to be heard.

About you and artist statement

- Re-writing an artist statement over and over again really helps to get into the depths of what your work is and about.
- Write things in ways that are accessible – find ways of simplifying your ideas and practice so that people can get it. Writing academically is cool but not always useful – make sure the application can make sense.
- What they're looking for is passion and interest in the project. What is it that you have done that relates? Have you done anything in the context of the project?
- How would you make the organisation know that you're right for the commissions? Look at what is said in the brief and make sure you're responding to those baselines in the brief as this is what the panel will be looking / scoring against

Quote public reaction or feedback

- If you've got some public reaction or feedback from the public, include it. Try to quote the experiences of other people have had with your work. Show that you've talked to people and engaged with them in your work. Saying it can be so refreshing in an application and organisations care about how they engage with the public.

DIY, network and skill share

- Link up with artist communities and get involved in DIY projects. Get to know people within the community and sector
- If possible invest in other people's skills in terms of documenting work, marketing, graphic design etc. Share skills to get a rounded sense of a practice. You don't have to be good at all the skills, find other people who are good at the ones you're not and learn.
- For this you can also look at Axis directory section to find skills, other artists and their work

Size of commission

- When getting started, look at smaller commissions to start with to build the experience. Often the smaller commissions are the ones that the organisations want new people and new voices
- a small commission could be £500 - £1000, but this could differ between organisation and group. Depends on the context
- Sometimes there are opportunities as a pair such as micro commissions alongside larger commissions and (lead) artists
- Use the organisation that's commissioned you for legacy – by doing blogs, Instagram take overs etc. Ask them things that you can you do on their site; can you share your creative process?

Relevance

- Use your own networks, websites, profiles etc to update on what you're doing.
- Put relevant experience into your CV. Make yourself feel as relevant to the opportunity as possible.
- Do your research on the organisation and bring that up in your application. Be interested in what that organisation is. Remember interviews are a two way process.
- Be proud of what you've done and made and show off your strengths.

Online presence

- Find a social media platform that works for you. You don't have to be on them all. Artist Travis Alabanza created a short video all about top tips for using social media, which you can watch here: <https://vimeo.com/447759293>
- Documentation doesn't have to be just in visuals. Find something that can show the concise heart of the project – perhaps a small bit of text?
- Find the right method and way for you. Think about how to make a Presence online. How do people get to websites and places? The more people find out about your practice, the better chance of opportunities and people reaching out.

Opportunities:

Axis

<https://www.axisweb.org/>

- Grad programme from Axis for extra mentoring and helping them with practical skills and elements
- Vacant space programme – taking empty properties and turn them into galleries or studio spaces
- Axis developing a fellowship as part of re-launch (something to keep an eye out)
- Axis Joining opportunity finder so that people can find the organisations that are right for you – project might not be right but saves time and might get noticed

Keep your eye's peeled on Axis website to see all opportunities plus others from other arts organisations

Open Eye Gallery

<https://openeye.org.uk/>

- Socially Engaged Photography Network – <https://openeye.org.uk/socially-engaged-photography-network/>
- Responsive program - <https://openeye.org.uk/responsive-programme/>
- Open Source - Open Source is a rolling submission-based open call, giving developing and early-career artists the opportunity to showcase their work digitally on the gallery's exterior screen, <https://openeye.org.uk/artist-support/>