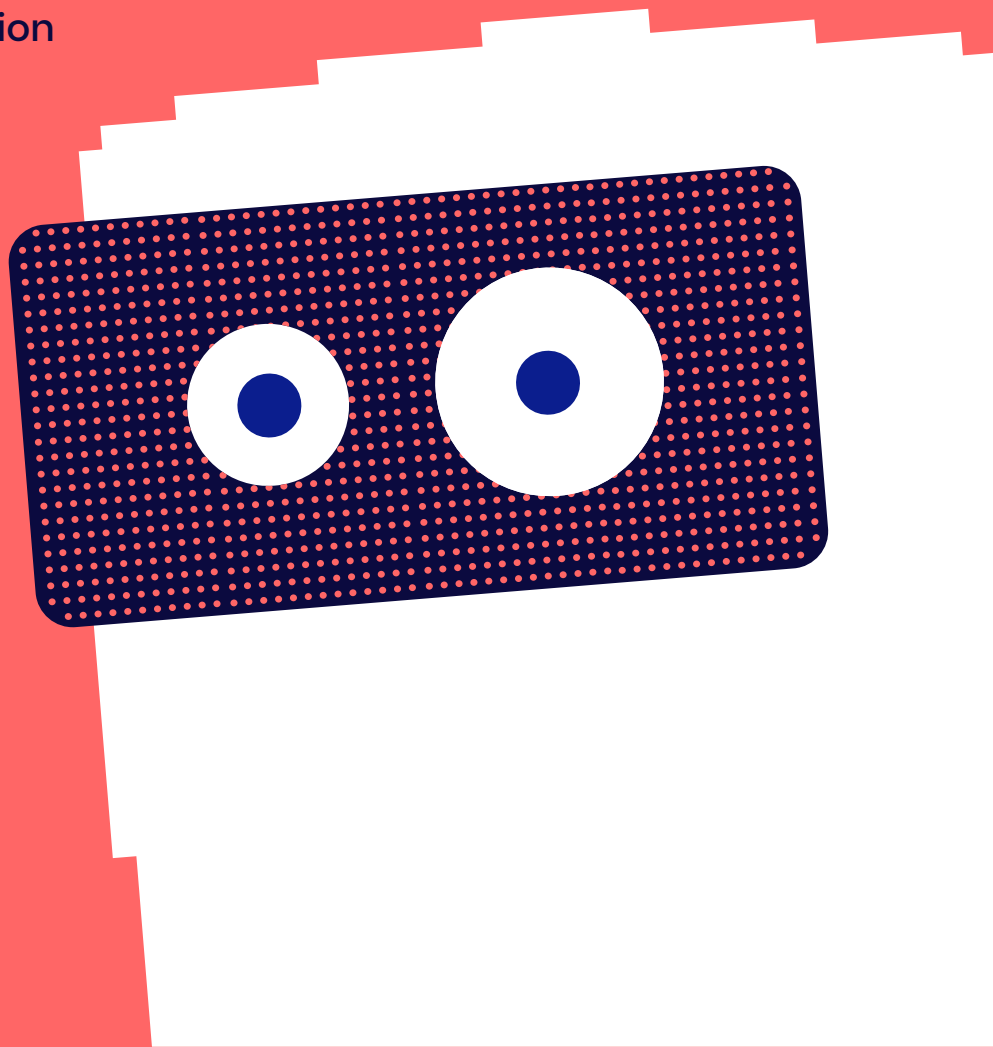

Early days of the immersive exhibition network.

Insights and recommendations
from sector experts exploring the
opportunities and challenges facing
artists, venues and audiences in
the exhibition and distribution
of immersive artworks.

**IMMERSIVE
ARTS**

**—
CELFYDDYDAU
YMDROCHOL**



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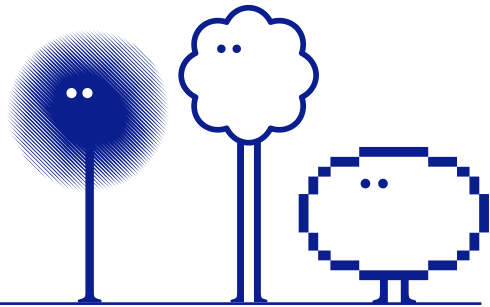
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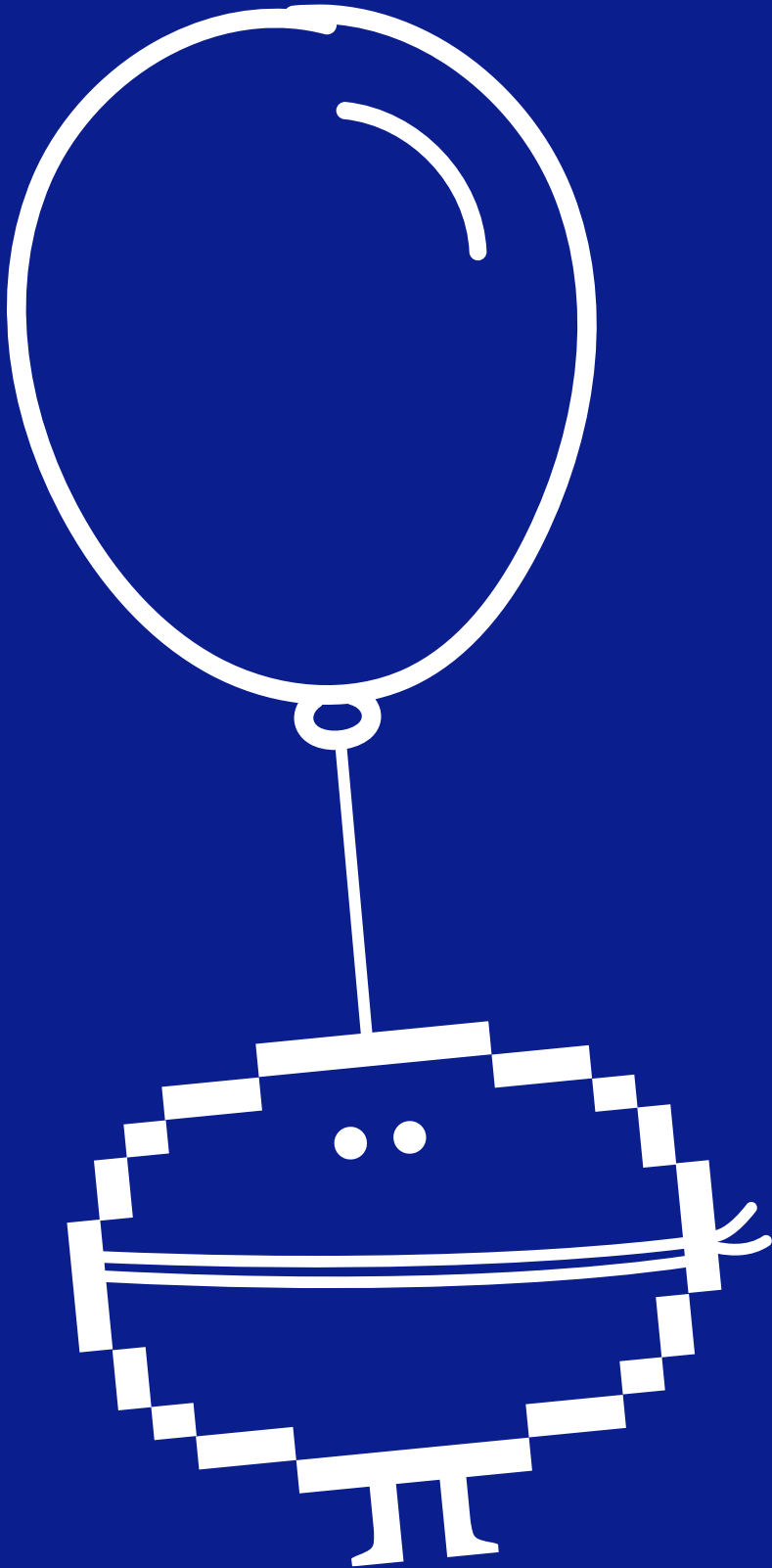
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Opening remarks

01



This is the first report from Immersive Arts, a three-year research and development programme designed to support artists across the UK who want to engage with immersive technologies.

Immersive Arts is a relatively new and rapidly evolving part of the UK's creative ecosystem and there are a huge number of open questions that we could have pursued as we set off on of this UK-wide programme of research. However, from conversations with artists, producers, venues, audiences and myriad others, it is clear that there are some vital and urgent questions to be addressed regarding the **exhibition** and **distribution** of immersive works. Where can artists share their work with the public? What do venues need in order to programme immersive artworks? How can audiences consistently access this kind of work? In this report we share some key insights and recommendations gleaned from interviews with those who are deeply involved within the immersive arts sector. I would like to thank everyone who gave their time for their open, honest and constructive contributions to this report. We hope it will help to advance conversations and offer some practical and actionable ways forward for those shaping the future of immersive arts.



Verity McIntosh

Director and Principal Investigator of Immersive Arts
Associate Professor of Virtual and Extended Realities,
University of the West of England

Verity McIntosh (Photographer: Jon Aitken)

The recently published UK Creative Industries Sector Plan demonstrates the huge importance of the creative industries as a catalyst for UK innovation and growth – economically, socially, and creatively.

It is therefore vital that creator – and artist-led work is recognised as a driver for this and is given an opportunity to flourish commercially and sustainably in the burgeoning and relatively new immersive experience market.

The Immersive Arts consortium of funders – AHRC, Arts Council England, Arts Council of Wales, Arts Council of Northern Ireland and Creative Scotland – warmly welcome the timely insights and recommendations offered by the Immersive Arts research team and the industry experts from around the world who have contributed to this important report. Together, we believe that the recommendations provide the beginnings of a 10 year+ road map to support the creation of an accessible,

inclusive and hyper-connected international network of exhibition and distribution for immersive arts and cultural content. The absence of such a network is identified by the report as a clear barrier to growth in the UK's immersive performance and experience sectors. Alongside this need for suitable distribution platforms and venues for different audiences, the report identifies further areas of work, including establish a knowledge exchange to share learning across areas such as skills training and industry production standards.

Speaking on behalf of all the Immersive Arts funding partners, we are extremely proud to have initiated the Immersive Arts programme. Together, we look forward to its continued success as it connects artists, creatives, researchers and producers, enabling them to experiment, explore and expand the UK's potential in immersive arts.

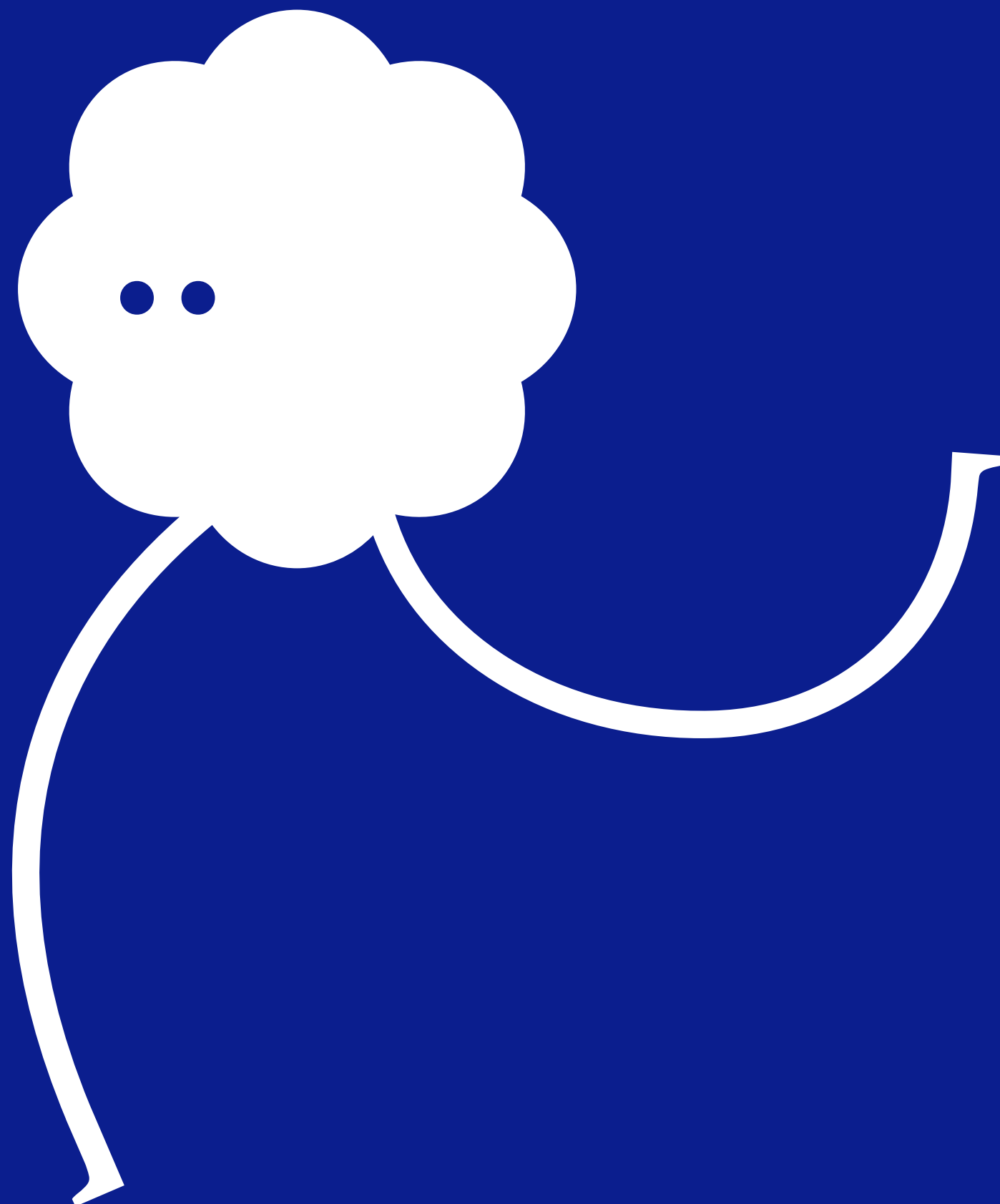


Dr Allan Sudlow

Director of Partnerships and Engagement at the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), on behalf of UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), Arts Council England (ACE), the Arts Council of Wales (ACW), Creative Scotland and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI).

Introduction

02





Bristol Inspiration Day 2024 (Photographer: Sham Ahmed)

What do we mean by immersive arts?

‘Immersive arts’ means different things to different people. We describe it as ‘art that uses technology to actively involve the audience’. We are interested in the use of technologies such as virtual, augmented and extended reality in the creation of artworks that bridge between physical and digital spaces, engaging multiple senses, and in artists and artworks that utilise technology to connect people to each other, and to their environment.

The immersive art sector is inherently interdisciplinary, drawing on expertise and influence from multiple disciplines such as art, technology, film and games. This interdisciplinarity is its strength, a convergent artform for convergent times. It can also result in immersive arts falling through the cracks between categories, with artists less able to access the resources and development support found elsewhere in the creative ecology.

Why focus on exhibition and distribution?

UK creativity in immersive arts is becoming world renowned.

To offer just a glimpse of the many UK artists recently winning international awards:

Proof As If Proof Were Needed by Blast Theory and Ting-Tong Chang – Special Jury Award XR Experience SXSW 2025

Soul Paint by Sarah Ticho – XR Experience winner, SXSW 2024

Hinterlands by Rebecca Evans – Grand Jury Award, Art*VR 2024

In Pursuit of Repetitive Beats by East City Films – Best Location-Based Entertainment of the Year, VR Awards 2023

The Pirate Queen: A Forgotten Legend by Eloise Singer – Tribeca Immersive Competition 2023

Consensus Gentium by Karen Palmer, SXSW XR Experience winner 2023

Goliath by Anagram – Best VR Immersive Work at Venice International Film Festival 2022

Radio Ghost by ZU-UK – 3D/Interactive Lumen Prize, 2022

Only Expansion by Duncan Speakman – Immersive XR award, BFI London Film Festival 2021

Immersive experiences by UK artists have been taking the world by storm. Where immersive arts experiences are publicly available, audiences are participating in impressive numbers. Over 180,000 people have now gone back in time and experienced the Great Pyramids through the Horizons of Khufu virtual reality experience, and immersive installation venue, the Outernet recently surpassed the Natural History Museum and British Museum to become London’s most popular visitor attraction.

Despite these success stories, many UK artists, including those winning awards around the world, report huge challenges when it comes to sharing their work with audiences, citing high costs, high risks, and an absence of consistent and sustainable exhibition and distribution opportunities in the sector as it stands.

Many UK artists find it particularly difficult to show work in their home nations, frequently finding more traction, investment and opportunity in international markets. This risks significant talent and IP drain, as has been seen elsewhere in the creative industries.

Over the past 10-15 years, the appetites of artists to make immersive works, and of audiences to experience them, have outpaced the development of robust distribution and exhibition networks. Without appropriate exhibition spaces and fit-for-purpose distribution and publishing models, there is now a conspicuous void between artworks and audiences, hobbling the growth of one of the most promising segments of the UK’s creative industries.

These are early days for the immersive sector. A lot is still being learned, and opportunities abound if equitable resources and infrastructure can be calibrated now to unlock an accessible, inclusive and sustainable network for immersive arts exhibition.

Expert focus groups and interviews

To explore this, we invited artists, makers, producers, venues, curators, commissioners, funders, festivals, researchers and tech companies to share their perspectives on exhibition and distribution of immersive arts experiences, an important and complex part of the immersive ecosystem.

Through a series of expert focus groups and individual interviews, contributors identified a number of key challenges, as well as examples of good practice and possibilities for ways in which the UK immersive arts exhibition and distribution ecosystem can become more connected, supported and productive.

Please note: Contributors to this research share myriad and sometimes contrasting perspectives and experiences. In this report we do not attempt to reconcile differing points of view, or to preference one reading of situation over another. All viewpoints are valid and valuable, and present a snapshot of the immersive arts industry at this precise moment as viewed from different angles.

Our sincere thanks to the contributors listed below, and to those who preferred not to be named, for sharing your unique insights and perspectives.

Bristol Inspiration Day 2024 (Photographer: Sham Ahmed)



Contributors:

Myriam Achard

Chief New Partnerships & PR, PHI

Catherine Allen

CEO and Lead Consultant, Limina Immersive

Maria Astakhova

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Mark Atkin

Curator/Creator, Crossover Labs

Lisa Brook

Artistic Director, Live Cinema UK

Harmeet Chagger-Khan

Creative Director, Surfing Light Beams

Asha Easton

Lead, Innovate UK Immersive Tech Network

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Artist, East City Films

Rebecca Evans

Artistic Director and Choreographer, Pell Ensemble

Shehani Fernando

Immersive Director, Indigo Storm

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Mitch Turnbull

Creative Producer/Director/Writer, Bramble Media

Carolina Vallejo

Executive Producer, Marshmallow Laser Feast

Jo Verrent

Director, Unlimited

Sarah Warden

Producer, Watershed

Eleanor Whitley

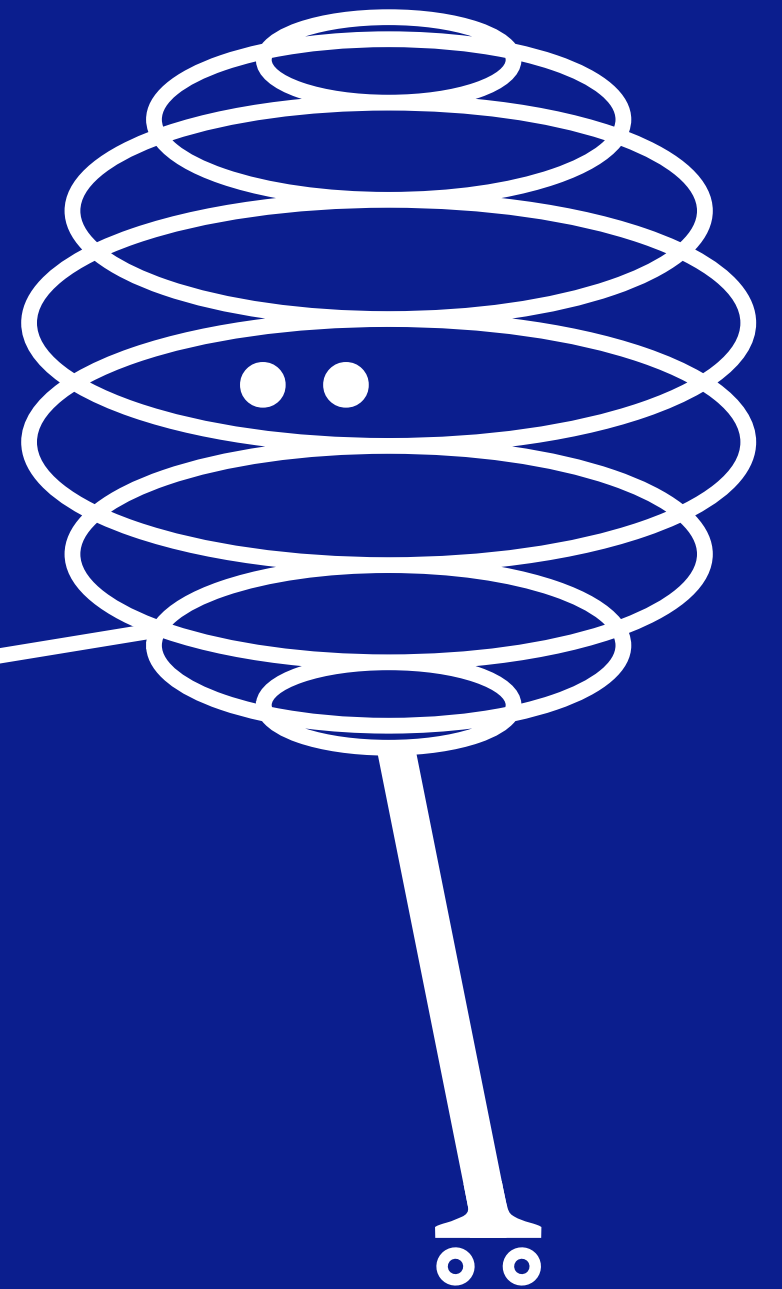
Exec Producer, Marshmallow Laser Feast

Sarah Wolozin

Director and Research Scientist, MIT Open Documentary Lab

How is Immersive Art exhibited now?

03



Immersive artworks and experiences are still relatively new entrants to the UK creative scene. Dedicated spaces in which to show immersive works are few and far between and many artists currently look for ways to share their work via existing platforms and contexts. An overview of settings most discussed by contributors to this report:

Exhibition

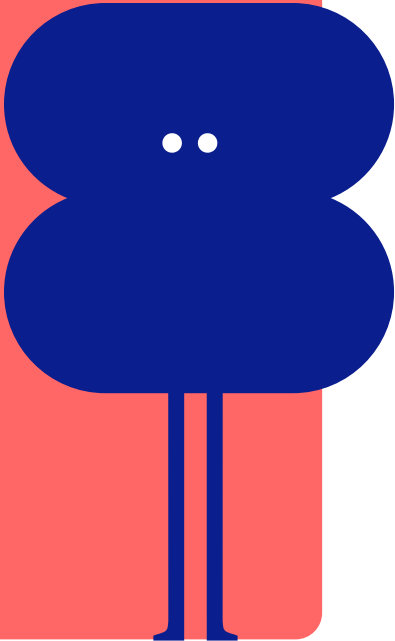
Arts Centres	Libraries	Museums	Galleries
Theatres	Cinemas	Full-dome / planetariums	Festivals
Events/conferences	Brand activations	Retail spaces and arcades	Dedicated immersive or location-based experience (LBE) venues
Site-specific locations	Pop-ups or 'meanwhile' spaces	Large-scale projection spaces	On the move e.g. immersive audio walks

Distribution

App stores e.g. Meta Store, Google Play or Apple app store	Games publisher e.g. STEAM	Specialist publisher e.g. Astrea or diversion cinema	Mobilising own networks – frequently referred to as 'hustling'	Publishing within an existing application e.g. VRChat
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“It’s really good to see that artists are, and have been building relationships with venues locally, and sharing their work. But from what I’ve seen it tends not to scale so easily.”
For artists wanting to take their work to more than one venue “that leap can be harder. It’s not that it hasn’t happened, it’s just that there are a number of barriers, and there are not systems in place to enable that”

Catherine Allen
CEO and Lead Consultant, Limina Immersive



The pros and cons of the ‘festival circuit’

One of the most discussed topics across all the interviews was festivals, and the significant role that they currently play within the immersive arts ecosystem. Many of the international festivals discussed have long histories of premiering film, documentary, visual arts, theatre or dance artworks. For artists working in some of these more traditional mediums, being selected to show work at a festival comes with the realistic expectation that work debuted in this context will be picked up by curators, programmers and publishers, resulting in the work going on to tour, or being distributed nationally or internationally.

In recent times, several festivals have begun to include immersive and interactive works as part of their programming e.g. International Documentary Festival Amsterdam (IDFA) DocLab, Venice Immersive, London Film Festival Expanded, Tribeca Immersive, Cannes Immersive Competition, Copenhagen International Documentary Film Festival (CPH:DOX). There are also several festivals that focus solely or primarily on immersive and interactive artworks e.g. VRHam, Electric South and Immersive Tech Week, Rotterdam, as well as newer entrants such as the Digital Body Festival in London.

With this opening up of festivals to immersive artists, many practitioners are now able to debut their work on one or more of these prestigious international stages.

“The festival network for narrative VR is still possibly the primary network for distribution. Certainly, the beginning of the journey and I think every good narrative VR project has a festival season of a year or two. The hope I think for most of the people that have those projects, and do the festivals, and get a lot of attention, is that they will find a distributor – of which there aren’t many, but there are some – that distribute both in physical locations and online.

Or that they will *directly* meet someone who will give them exhibition opportunities – physical exhibition or touring, or that they might meet tech companies or a platform who are going to help them to get their project onto a ‘store’”

Dan Tucker
East City Films and independent producer

Festivals are also often considered a good place to ‘meet the industry’ and to build your profile as a maker.

“A festival audience is a good audience to tap into because they are looking for stuff and they have a finite amount of time, and it’s a really good way of getting your work out to those people. And it’s a really good way of getting visibility and profile so it’s good for reputation building”

Harmeet Chagger-Khan
Creative Director, Surfing Light Beams

Harmeet also spoke of the limitations of festivals as the lack of a natural next step “can mean that you don’t then get it out to a wider public”

Harmeet Chagger-Khan
Creative Director, Surfing Light Beams

“For projects from here (South Africa), going to these festivals is prohibitively expensive because we’re having to get filmmakers there, and we just don’t have the funding generally to do that. I think that makes it hard both for the festival programmers and for the artists. It’s harder then to have a truly global programme, because there’s blocks on both sides”

Ingrid Kopp
Cultural Producer, Electric South

You:Matter by Marshmallow Laser Feast, commissioned by the National Science and Media for Bradford 2025 UK City of Culture (Photographer: Keyhan Modaressi)



Some spoke about a risky tendency of those in the sector to see arrival at the festival circuit as an end unto itself. “I think we’ve got to the point where you can’t just make work and put it on at film festivals anymore. That’s not viable for reaching audiences, and when you are having to look for alternate sources of finance that aren’t necessarily public funders it’s not a viable business model either.”

Lisa Brook
Artistic Director, Live Cinema UK

It is important to note that the financial implications of taking immersive works to festivals can be substantial, often requiring artists to take on significant risk and debt in the hopes that it will lead to future opportunities.

“it’s very expensive to take work to festivals in the first place, and the costs are very, very rarely covered by the festivals themselves”

Lisa Brook
Artistic Director, Live Cinema UK

The lack of infrastructure for distribution can result in a work having a highlight opportunity at a festival, garnering critical acclaim, being awarded the coveted festival ‘laurels’, and yet never being seen again.

Comotion Dome Hall 2025 (Photographer: Dom Moore)



Where else?

Immersive-first venues

For many makers, the best fit for their immersive, location-based experiences is not in traditional venues, but in interdisciplinary, flexible spaces, such as the PHI Centre (Montreal) or The Factory International (Manchester) with their high ceilings, open spaces and digital infrastructure. Within the Immersive Arts partnership, Bocs at Wales Millennium Centre (Cardiff) and Undershed at Watershed (Bristol), offer year-round programming showcasing a broad range of immersive artforms and technologies.

Cultural venues

Many artists are finding ways to share their work with audiences by partnering with existing cultural venues such as libraries, cinemas, museums and galleries, sometimes leveraging their professional networks from other disciplines to bring immersive works to arts audiences.

Experiential art collective Marshmallow Laser Feast spoke about the importance, but also the limitations of building and continually renewing personal relationships within the current exhibition and distribution ecosystem.

“What has been relatively successful for us is getting commissions or finding an opportunity to work with someone who wants to back an original work, then turning that into a tourable, or licensable asset. You are ultimately the artist, production company and distributor. This is necessary to sustain the operation but can stretch resources very thin. The model relies on us consistently building relationships with a broad network of curators, presenters, programmers etc – and that’s quite challenging to resource.”

Eleanor Whitley
Exec Producer, Marshmallow Laser Feast

For artists without extensive networks and the kind of credibility that is built over many years, the sector can feel impenetrable and exclusive. If, as some signalled in conversation, the UK immersive ecosystem continues to be based on ‘who you know’ it will miss out on the rich diversity of voices and talent of the creative sector, reinforcing and compounding inequities found elsewhere in the arts and culture sector.

Public funding can help to intervene in these systems, creating opportunities for artists, venues and audiences that do not rely solely on personal networks or ‘cold call’ approaches.



StoryTrails

StoryTrails, part of UNBOXED: Creativity in the UK was a large-scale commissioning and exhibition programme for immersive storytelling. Artist-led experiences took place in town squares, libraries, streets and cinemas in 15 locations across the UK in 2022 inviting local people to travel through time, and to experience their town in a new way through untold local stories using AR and VR. The cultural impact of this was significant, with Ben Luxford saying it “accelerated people’s feelings of their relationship with their place” and made them “connected to where they were from”.

Ben Luxford
Director of UK Audiences, British Film Institute.

@StoryTrails and @StoryFutures / David Olusoga, StoryTrails



Interviewees noted the limitations of publicly funded projects that have finite resources and timescales.

“It was really good, but the problem was, which is the same problem with getting new venues to start showing immersive work, is that they need to upskill the librarians. Then there is the question of who is getting the kit. Then upgrading the kit. And then keeping the staff upskilled as they turnover.” She suggests that “When it was set up it worked very well, but once it [the funded programme] was finished there were varying degrees to which the libraries continued to show work.”

Asha Easton
Network Lead, Innovate UK Immersive Tech Network

Sarah Wolozin notes that this problem is not unique to immersive technology, nor to libraries.

“This is a typical story for technology being put anywhere. If you don’t train people and they don’t have the skills, when you leave it falls apart”

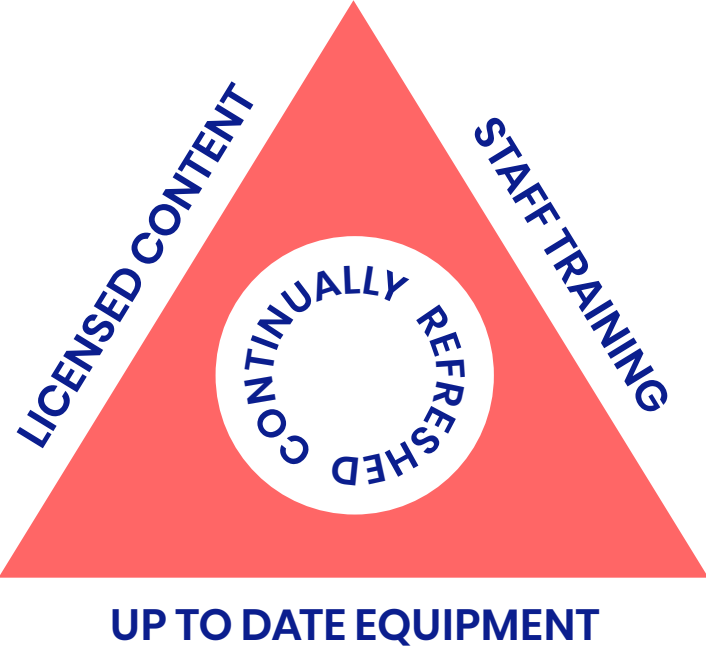
Sarah Wolozin
Director and Research Scientist,
MIT Open Documentary Lab

The issue of short vs long-term resourcing came up time and again within the interviews and can perhaps be distilled down to three practical components, and the need for continual reinvestment in each.

In many cases, this is how cultural organisations already operate. However, perhaps as a consequence of the unfamiliarity and/or the rapid rate of change, there appears to be a hesitancy on the part of venues and their funders to incorporate immersive experiences into their regular cycle of renewal.

Artist Rebecca Evans reflects that this may have to do with venues becoming over-cautious following mixed experiences with early experimentation. She notes that in the current climate “Venues may be surprised to discover how little production is actually needed to make really exciting experiences”. She points particularly to live performance, theatre and dance, where immersive productions can be more agile and self-sufficient than the ‘big build’ touring shows.

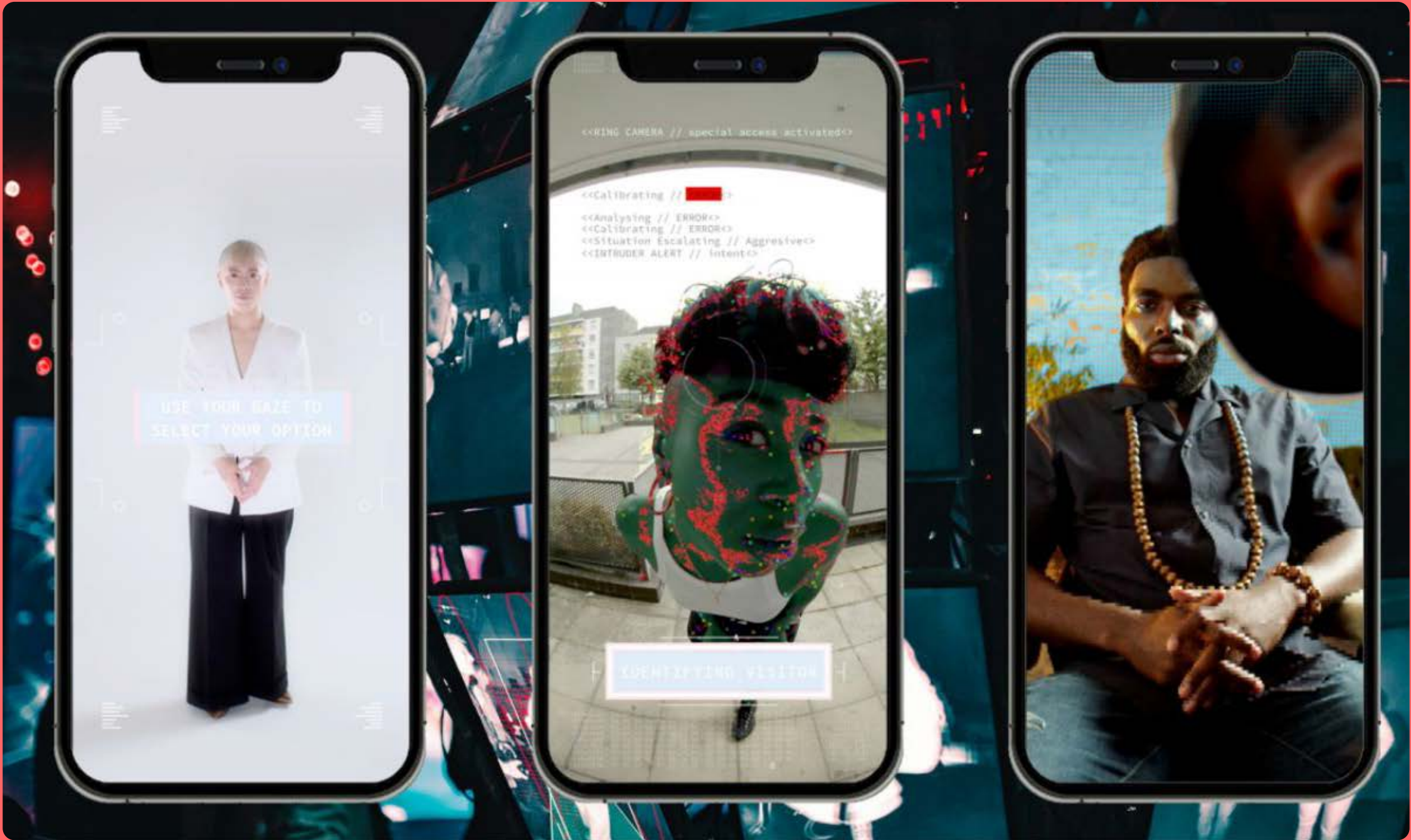
Reflection on the conditions required for sustainable exhibition of XR experiences in cultural venues



Beyond venue walls

Some artists are thinking creatively about places to connect with their audiences. Removing the cultural specificity of arts, culture and heritage spaces, and meeting people where they are.

Interviewees spoke about site-specific works that feel rooted in a sense of place, and immersive audio works that encourage you to walk the city/town/hills as you listen. They also spoke about showing work in empty high streets units, and 'meanwhile' use spaces that can be taken over for short-run exhibitions in locations that are awaiting redevelopment.



Consensus Gentium
by artist Karen Palmer
and producer Tom Millen

Consensus Gentium - Credit: Interactive Film

Consensus Gentium is a phone-based immersive film exploring ideas of privacy and control. Of democratising AI and democratising the arts. After gaining critical acclaim on the festival circuit, the team took the decision to tour the work to eleven shopping centres around the

UK, mainly in the Midlands and the North of England. They wanted to share the work with people who are most likely to be impacted by these technologies, but who are rarely empowered to make decisions of any substance about them.

[View website](#)



Audiences

Exhibition of immersive works can introduce existing arts audiences to a new form. It can also bring new audiences. Recent audience studies suggest that many audience members attending immersive events in cultural venues are entering that venue for the first time. They often come from a broader range of backgrounds and may have different lived experiences to the baseline demographic for the venue.

Ben Luxford shared findings from the recent StoryFutures and BFI Xperience project which supported the sharing of virtual reality experiences in cinemas.

“What we’ve seen is that it’s always a very different audience to the one that that cinema knows. Even though it’s smaller [audiences] they are completely different people. You’re not transferring your traditional cinema goer into a VR experience; you’re bringing in new people into the space”

Ben Luxford
Director of UK Audiences, British Film Institute (BFI)

Cultivation of an audience culture within the immersive arts sector was a recurrent theme throughout the conversations. The suggestion is that audiences currently do not know where they can find work, there is very little mainstream journalism in the sector, and no central place to find this kind of information.

“There are some real basics that I think audiences would want that are not there, but at the same time, audiences are having amazing experiences, like next level, mind blowing experiences so often moving, bringing them to tears of joy. I often say immersive content, especially the arts, are like a mood machine. I can go in feeling one way, come out feeling another. It’s like magic”.

Catherine Allen
CEO and Lead Consultant, Limina Immersive

To develop a stronger audience culture for the sector, audiences need to be able to consistently access a variety of works, and to develop their own taste and preferences as they do with other forms of art and media.

“Audiences have this one experience that was either good or bad, and then that’s it. And so, rather than having that real wide variety of choice and going, “Oh, I really like mixed reality. I don’t like VR. I really like when it does this, or that” – getting a critical audience is only going to come through more exposure.”

Rebecca Evans
Artistic Director and Choreographer, Pell Ensemble

There was a range perspectives regarding expectations of ticket costs amongst contributors to the conversation. For some the expectation was that most immersive works would be free to audiences, giving them an opportunity to try something that they do not yet know whether they will enjoy.

“There’s still that risk element of people not knowing what this stuff is and then not wanting to actually fork out money for it.”

Mitch Turnbull
Creative Producer/Director/Writer, Bramble Media

Some expressed concern that setting audience costs too low could de-value the work, contributing to an impression that immersive works are insubstantial, or based on novelty. Potentially creating an expectation of low or no cost as the default amongst venues and audiences, making it an unsustainable practice for artists in the longer term.

“You can’t keep showing everything for free and not licensing makers.”

Shehani Fernando
Immersive Director, Indigo Storm

You:Matter by Marshmallow Laser Feast, commissioned by the National Science and Media for Bradford 2025 UK City of Culture (Photographer: Keyhan Modaressi)



The business model, including the cost of tickets, is particularly important within the immersive art industry, where ‘throughput’ (the number of people that can go through an experience at a given time) can present challenges to commercial distribution. Engagement with

immersive experiences is often limited due to practical challenges, such as the number of VR headsets available, equipment charging and the length of time required for responsible onboarding and offboarding processes.

Access

As an emerging creative medium, the immersive art sector has an opportunity to develop with access and inclusion among its first principles. In 2022 broadcaster David Olusoga wrote in The Guardian “a new medium arrives in the world with no history and, to an extent, no cultural baggage” suggesting that engrained cultures of exclusivity and prejudice that have so plagued the media and arts sectors “should and potentially can be left behind and prevented from infecting VR and AR”. To deliver on this potential, accessibility will be critical to the exhibition and distribution of immersive works.

Several interviewees pointed to the inconsistency in how current works are communicated to audiences, particularly in terms of access for disabled audiences. Key information is often absent regarding the format and staging of a work, including how it can, or cannot be experienced by people with different needs.

“It will come as no surprise that access is a real issue, because people aren’t building alternative versions for people with sight loss, hearing impairments or any impairment really. The equipment is relatively standardised, but you’re not even told in advance what you can bring along yourself to support that.”

Jo Verrent
Director, Unlimited

Contributors noted a growing frustration from disabled audiences who have sought out immersive experiences only to find that they are barred from participating or significantly limited in the extent to which they can interact, making them unlikely to return for future programming.

Cultural venues may require further support in making immersive artworks accessible to disabled audiences, including enabling venue staff to confidently support the diverse needs of audiences during immersive experiences.

Researcher and designer Clarice Hilton shared the challenge of “having made work that has involved thinking hard about access features and implementing them; but often the places we are showing the work are themselves inaccessible. It’s then extra work [for the artists] to work with the institution to make sure the place itself is accessible as well as the work”.

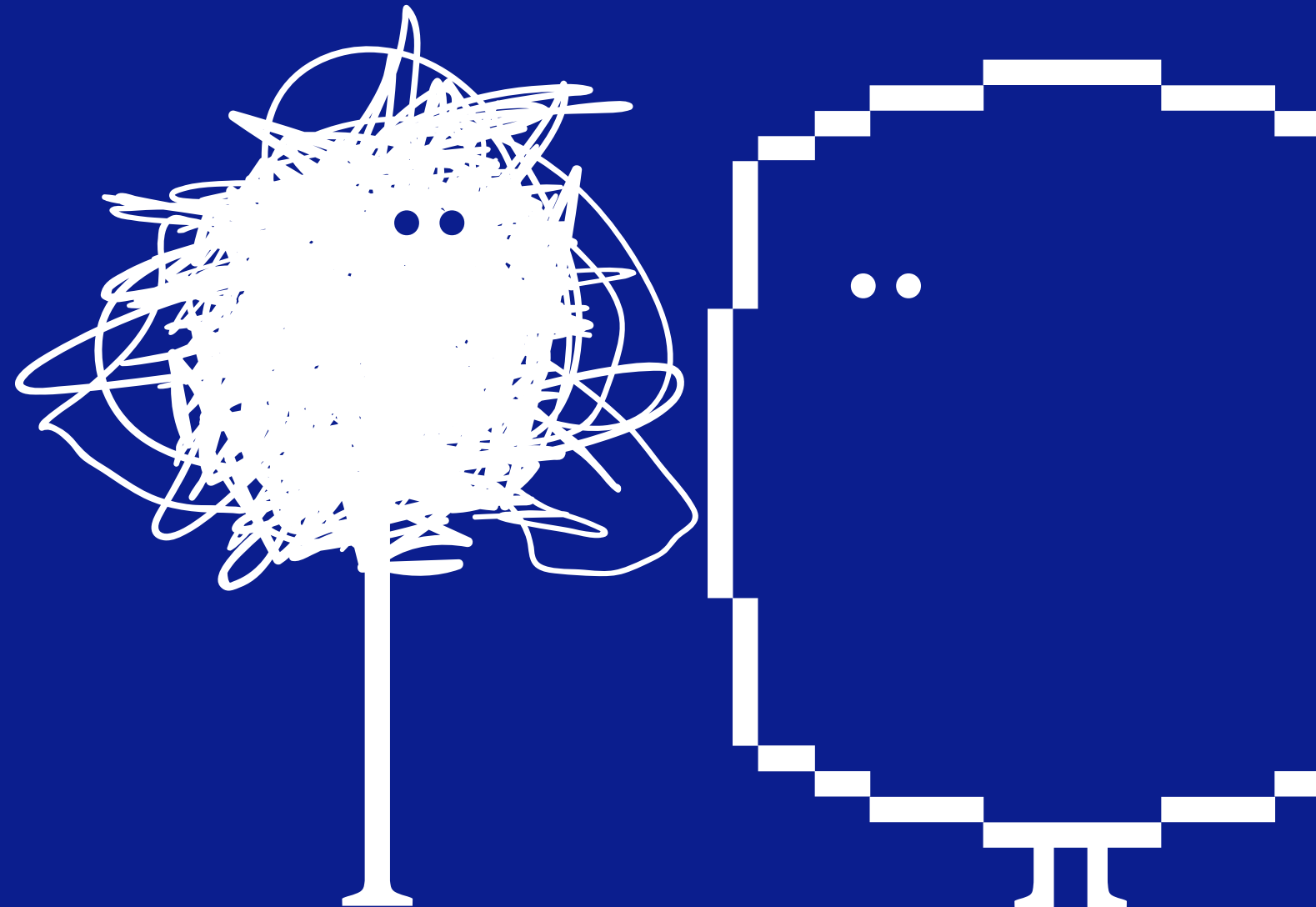
Clarice Hilton
Researcher/Designer, Anagram/Goldsmiths

Comotion Dome Hall 2025 (Photographer Dom Moore)

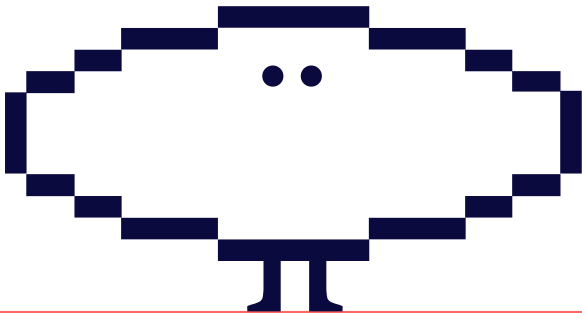


Time for a network?

04



A recurring theme in the interviews was the desire for a formal network of distribution partners across the UK, and internationally. Such a network could enable artists to tour their work, with standardised training for venue staff and consistency in updating equipment at the same rate.



“I’ve been dreaming of a network of venues that would work together... so we could take a piece and tour it in different venues...We all agree that we need a network, but who’s going to be the person that says, “I’m going to be in charge and make that happen?””.

Myriam Achard
Chief New Partnerships & PR, PHI

This was not the start of this conversation, and such networks are beginning to be established in areas of the UK between venues and cultural organisations. For example, The Immersive Network is an Arts Council England funded project seeking to strengthen relationships between venues around the UK who are presenting immersive work. The foundational group includes Watershed (Bristol), FACT (Liverpool), BOCS (at Wales Millenium Centre, Cardiff), and Broadway (Nottingham), and their intentions include developing best practice around exhibiting immersive work; touring artworks; and sharing learnings across the sector.

What are the barriers to a UK/international network?

Throughout the discussions, many areas were identified in which artists and audiences are experiencing challenges around exhibition and distribution of immersive art experiences. Themes that consistently arose include:

Interdisciplinarity

Immersive art is not just one thing. It is inherently interdisciplinary, encompassing multiple forms of creative practice and a broad spectrum of ever-changing technologies. This is part of what makes it so exciting but also creates a tension. If each work is different from the next, requiring different installation, technical, staffing licensing and communication strategies, how can venues consistently receive touring works.

“There are so many different types of formats that are shown in different types of venues [...] Some is more performing arts related, some is destined for online storefronts, some is designed for retail spaces.”

Liz Rozenthal
Curator and Executive Producer,
Venice Biennale & Power to the Pixel

To an extent, cultural venues such as galleries, museums and theatre spaces already expect a degree of variability when installing creative works, whereas more fixed infrastructure venues such as cinemas and libraries, and music and games publishers may be less well configured to exhibit and distribute wildly varying works.

Understanding what venues can take which types of work is a particular skill and interviewees spoke to a difficulty in accessing that information.

“Up to this point the industry has needed producers that work in a single genre. We are now in need of producers for XR works that can communicate a wide range of artistic forms and navigate a variety of sites for exhibition and performance.”

Rebecca Evans
Artistic Director and Choreographer, Pell Ensemble

Currently, artists often work incredibly hard to assemble their own mini-touring network to support the distribution of a particular piece of work.

Dan Tucker and Darren Emerson from East City Films shared recent experience of taking their show ‘In Pursuit of Repetitive Beats’ on tour to a broad range of cultural venues and spaces across the UK and internationally.

“By the end of this tour [...] we will have created a demonstrable touring network for immersive, where there are the right kind of spaces, and people who have had some knowledge transfer from us. They will have built some capacity, will have done some skills training, and we will have also trained between 20 and 30 young people in each city in how to work on a complex immersive exhibition”

Dan Tucker
Producer, East City Films / Independent

This kind of self-initiated temporary network can send helpful signals to other artists as to where their work might be exhibited, and there is clearly a vibrant informal network of immersive artists and producers swapping tips and sharing contacts to try to get around the nascent and inconstant nature of the current ecosystem. Experienced and skilled producers who can navigate this emergent, interdisciplinarity network are understood to be in very high demand and short supply.

The Whale (Photographer Sung Hoon Song)



Standardisation

In order for work to travel freely and sustainable between venues, Mark Atkin suggests that “In the end we just need a set of standards. Every rider will start looking a little bit similar rather than radically different from each other. And there can be staff in each organisation who can read that rider and understand them.”

Mark Atkin
Curator/Creator, Crossover Labs

A common set of industry standards could make it possible for artists, venues and audiences to share and find information about immersive experiences, to demystify processes which are tucked away in different corners of a disconnected network. Contributors discussed the potential of having a central resource for sharing knowledge around practical things such as formats, licensing, tax relief, market research and established routes to audience.

“it’s also a lot around infrastructure... So, [the artists’] focus can be on creative development and their idea and not necessarily having to think about operation and deployment and are able to use more off the shelf services.”

Samantha King
Head of Programming, VIVE Arts

Several participants highlighted the importance of making such information universally available wherever possible;

“That process needs to be demystified. Otherwise, it becomes another exclusive network.”

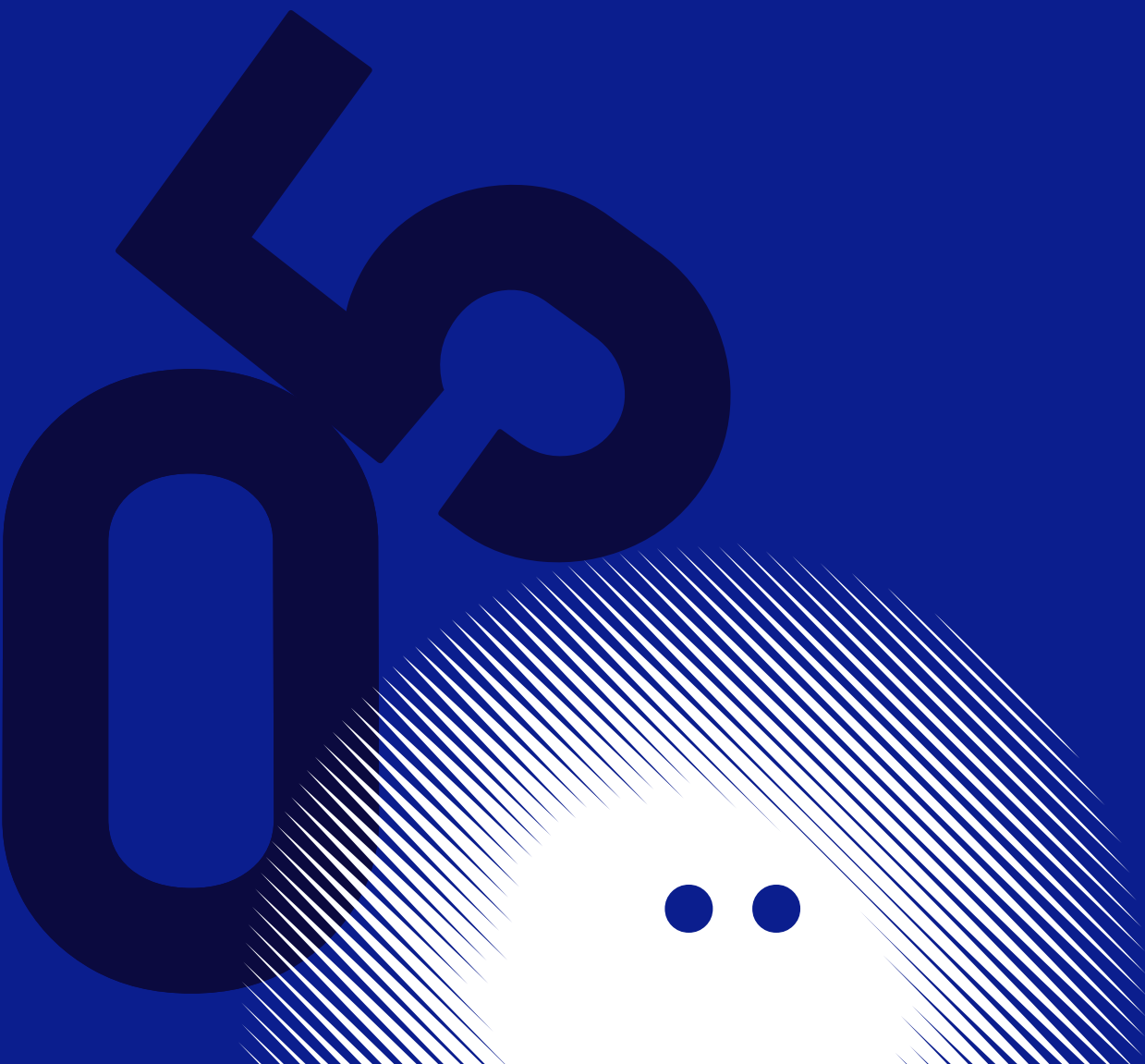
Harmeet Chagger-Khan
Creative Director, Surfing Light Beams



“I know sometimes people can be protective about their tools or their secret sauce, but I think somewhere, somehow we can meet and share knowledge and experience.”

Marshmallow Laser Feast

What can be done now?



The Big Thing 2025 – Designing Deep Feedback Loops with Elijah (Photographer Keyhan Modaressi)

Planning for the longer term

In the UK there have been a number of pilot programmes designed to catalyse various aspects of the immersive sector. Public sector investments such as Creative XR, Audiences of the Future, StoryFutures, XRStories and now Immersive Arts have played an important role in de-risking and diversifying R&D, developing in the sector. Each has had a significant impact, but all have been tightly time-bounded, and after a few short years, they are dissolved. A conspicuous consequence of this project-based approach is the inability to build on learnings, and to invest in longer-term, robust infrastructure that could support the resilience of the sector for future generations.

“You can’t change anything in 1 or 2 years, so you’ve got to play the long game”

Ingrid Kopp
Cultural Producer, Electric South



you!! [Laughter] .
All right. But instead, yeah, this kind of sprawled out into being its own kind of art project question on these things, but by bit, you know how can I get paid, that's one bit that is super hard, making whatever you like is super hard without having to fund it without having to

Whole sector, connected strategy

Asha Easton from the Innovate UK Immersive Tech Network discussed the need for a systems-wide approach, and for funding not to be silo-ed into R&D, touring etc. She described the particular importance of funding for content and distribution to go hand in hand to ensure joined up thinking at all levels.

Samantha King from VIVE Arts emphasised that artists also need funding at different levels, from funding for developing the digital skills of artists stepping into the immersive space for the first time, to funding mid-career artists who are really innovating, and supporting advanced creative practice seeking to scale the international reach of their work. Also, distribution funding is needed for all involved, if we are to ensure a healthy, productive and super-connected ecosystem at all levels.

Several interviews suggested that now would be the perfect time for the UK to come out of ‘pilot mode’, and to develop a 10 year+ strategy, creating a roadmap to a fit-for-the-future immersive arts ecosystem. An immersive-specific companion piece to the UK’s recent [Industrial Strategy Creative Sector Plan](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/creative-industries-sector-plan) (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/creative-industries-sector-plan) could include a plan for joined up exhibition and distribution, taking a wider systemic approach and combining a range of interconnected elements to enable healthy and sustainable sector growth.

UK distribution network for new and existing work

Catherine Allen from Limina Immersive suggests that a well-funded distribution network “could be an easy win because we’ve got so much great content”, noting that this content is almost entirely inaccessible to audiences as current systems are not in place for it to break through.

A number of contributors lamented the disconnect between the number of UK artists with an impressive back-catalogue of high quality, often award-winning and canonical immersive experiences, and the absence of a functioning distribution system would enable willing, paying audiences to experience them.

A hyper-connected network of distribution partners across the UK could benefit from economies of scale, sharing knowledge including curatorial, operational and legal resources, running on a similar cadence of refreshing equipment and staff training. Artist’s work would be able to travel more readily between venues in the UK and connect collectively to international networks. Audiences would begin to have consistent points of access to experience incredible immersive works wherever they are in the UK.

Support for cultural venues

As a practical step in the short and medium term, existing cultural venues such as cinemas, galleries, museums and libraries could be supported to integrate immersive artworks into their regular programming. This would involve acquiring and maintaining equipment and upskilling staff to ensure consistent audience experiences. Interviewees spoke of the challenge of maintaining and updating relevant training when new staff join an organisation and developing adaptable curatorial and front of house practices that can meet the accessibility needs of different audiences.

Investment in non-traditional spaces

Spaces that are ‘immersive first’ can have a huge impact on the sector, providing dedicated hubs for knowledge and as key sites for artists and audience development, whilst retaining the agility to take risks and set new precedents that can ripple through a wider network.

Investment could also be invaluable in seeding non-venue-based distribution models e.g. streaming services and publishing platforms. Such platforms would need to be developed to accommodate XR-specific formats, and standards across devices with integrated licensing, revenue and rights management models that would allow artists to share their work with the growing in-home and location-based audiences. Many contributors discussed the kinds of content libraries and recommendation engines that could be developed alongside such platforms to improve the discovery and shareability of the UK’s high-quality immersive arts content with audiences at scale.

Standards

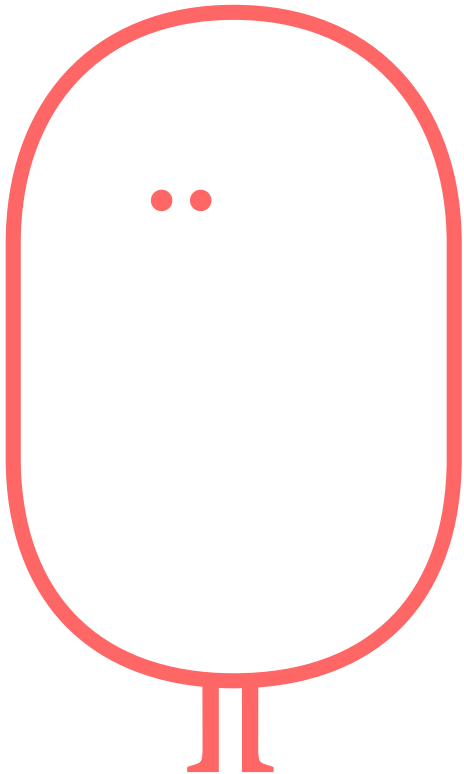
Artists are making highly detailed, bespoke work in multiple formats, often without the requisite information available about whether venues and platforms will be able to present work in these formats. Significantly limiting the tourability and scalability of work. A commonly used set of standard descriptors around elements such as file formats, hardware, internet connectivity, staging and portability as well as defined modes and levels of audience interaction, accessibility and staff supervision could help artists and programmers to confidently present audience-ready, accessible works in a range of different venue contexts.

Skills training

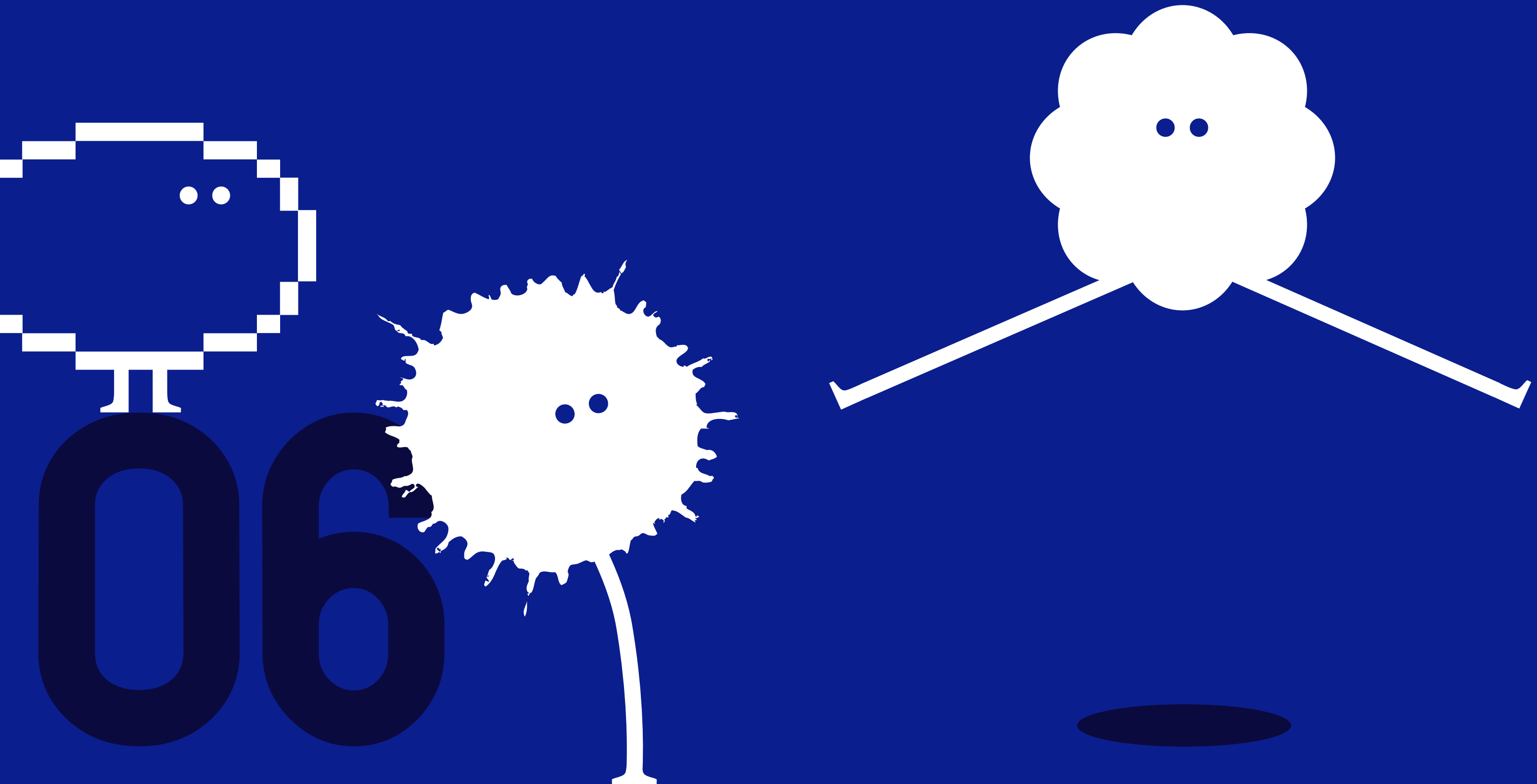
The role of the Producer was specifically highlighted as integral to the success or failure of contemporary work in finding its audience. From advice at the earliest stages of development and co-ordination across interdisciplinary teams, to brokerage with funders, partners and venues, and driving audience participation. Many contributors spoke to the current lack of skilled professionals in this space, and the need for more development opportunities for new entrants to develop these vital skills and peer networks.

A professional industry body

Participants spoke about a need for a centralised organisation equipped to speak on behalf of the immersive creative industries, to lobby policymakers and to advocate for the sector internationally. Contributing to and supporting long-term thinking and strategic planning. Liz Rosenthal suggested that this could take the form of a Producer’s Guild, with funded staff positions, and a digital platform for sharing information.



What could the future hold?



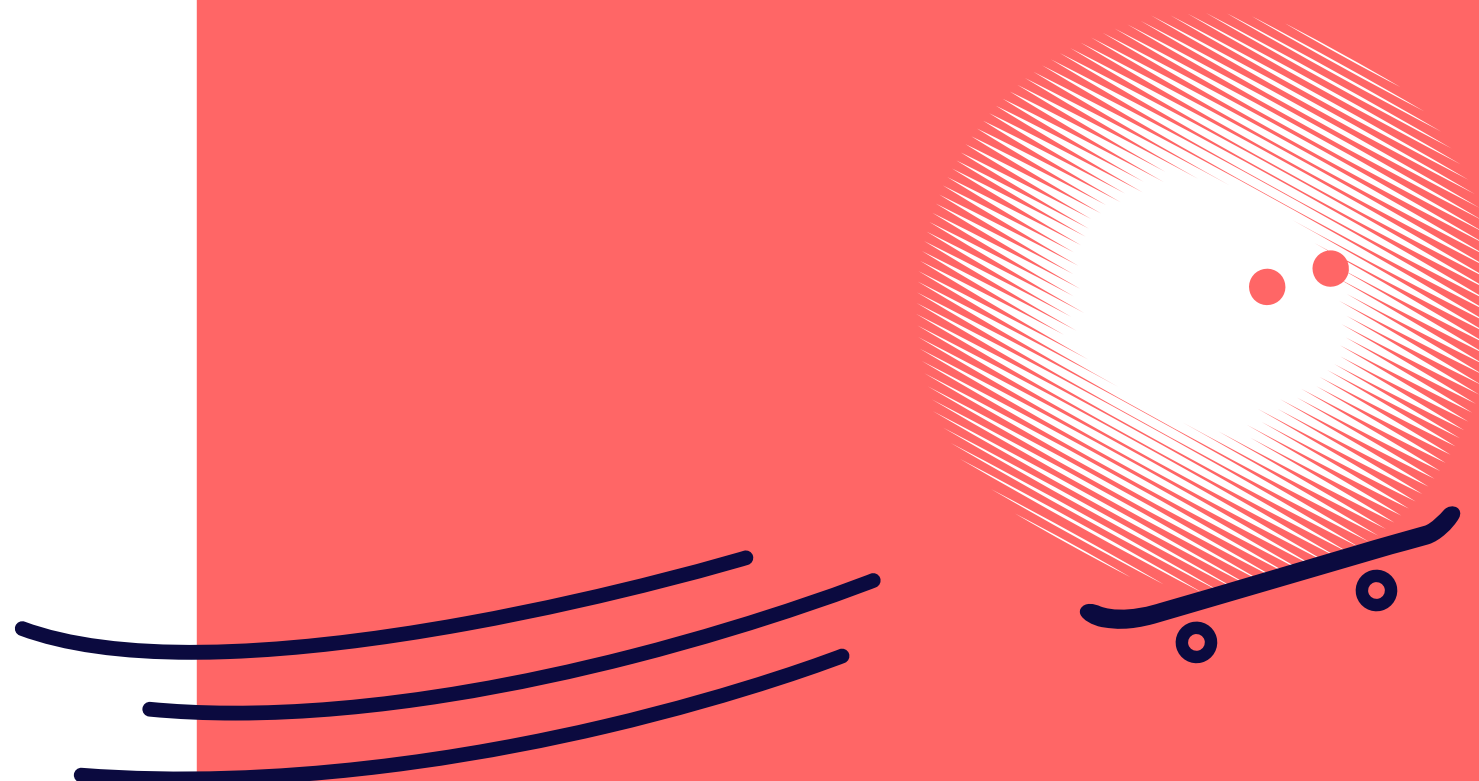
A successful immersive arts exhibition and distribution ecosystem will provide the **infrastructure** for artists to produce high-quality, accessible works that are scalable and profitable, invigorating the spaces and communities in which the work is shown.

A strong **audience culture** will be developing, with both mainstream and indie works valued, informed journalism and critics engaging with contemporary work, and with immersive arts developing a strong identity, recognised and valued as its own artform.

Sector-specific **standards** will be broadly adopted, allowing exhibition publishing and streaming models to proliferate, lowering unpredictability and risks for artists, venues and publishers, and complementing the interdisciplinarity of the sector.

Audiences can **access** artworks by a diverse community of makers, in a wide range of settings.

With an established and consistent network of formal and informal exhibition venues and publishing platforms, artists and audiences from around the world gravitate to the **UK as a hub** of creativity and innovation, generating **sustainable and inclusive growth** in the UK economy, driving inward investment exporting UK artistry whilst retaining **talent and intellectual property (IP)** and revitalising the UK's global standing as a kaleidoscope of hyper-connected, innovative and **diverse creative excellence**.



About Immersive Arts

Immersive Arts is an ambitious UK-wide sector research, development and artists funding programme, taking an artist-led approach to working with immersive technologies. The programme encourages artists of all backgrounds and expertise to explore, experiment or expand how they work with immersive technologies.

Immersive Arts is led by a consortium of partners who are deeply embedded within the UK's immersive arts and research communities.

Immersive Arts is supported by the UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), Arts Council England (ACE), the Arts Council of Wales (ACW), Creative Scotland and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI). Funding from Creative Scotland, ACW and ACNI is provided by The National Lottery.

Keep up to date with immersive arts news and future research

You can find related research on the [Immersive Arts website](#).

Consortium partners:



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