



Circle by Roxana Vilik and Squidsoup from B&BR&D Hopeful Futures Event (image credit Jon Aitken)

# Pervasive Media Studio Report for Arts Council England

April 2022 – March 2023



pervasive media studio

**WATERSHED**



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**ARTS COUNCIL  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Jo Lansdowne, Watershed Executive Producer

Pervasive Media Studio supports a creative community to make extraordinary and inspiring work. We foreground the power of art and the imagination to direct technology towards a more inclusive, playful, and sustainable world.

Giving free work space to artists in Bristol City Centre has never felt more radical and necessary – to combat gentrification, low wages and the increasing difficulty around funding R&D. The results of our annual survey demonstrate some notable successes – our community reached nearly 130 million people with their projects, and some areas of concern – annual turnover was approximately £11.5k per resident less than the previous year.

Our focus this year has been on

- 1) re-asserting our **leadership at the intersection of art and technology**
- 2) sharing our work with a **wide range of audiences**
- 3) ensuring that the Studio is a place of **active and available participation**.

#### **Re-asserting our leadership at the intersection of art and technology**

Our ongoing research partnerships have enabled us to run thematic programmes supporting artists to make new work with and generate knowledge about the role of art and technology; as it enables playful interaction in public space, in designing cultural experiences with minoritized older adults, and as part of our role as global citizens. In addition, our eco-systemic approach means that we are able to offer access to early career skills development (Make Shift), advice about the ongoing work of keeping a creative practice going (timebank surgeries with technologists, producers, lawyers and accountants), R&D grants to experiment (artist residencies, Fellowships, prototype funding), and bespoke business support (Create Growth programme) to hundreds of creative companies in the region – with each part of our programme designed to consider cultural, social, environmental and commercial value.

We have also worked hard to codify and share our learnings for the wider arts sector, launching a Climate Action Toolkit, Inclusion Framework for Change and Guide to Random Selection. These resources are all designed with and for creatives with the intention of making it easier for us all to contribute towards a future within which we can all thrive.

#### **Sharing our work with a wide range of audiences**

The Studio celebrated its fifteenth birthday in February with a series of invitations to get involved. We hosted an afternoon of talks and discussion for residents, partners and friends of the Studio. This was followed by an extended First Friday social event, showcasing work from the Studio's history which was attended by over 150 members of our wider network, and then a hands-on Saturday open day focussed on families and young people which welcomed 792 people to the Studio (many for the first time).

Our lunchtime talk programme this year has included speakers such as Sacha Wares, Nikesh Shukla and Kat Cizek with audiences from the UK, US, Egypt, Canada, Saudi Arabia, Japan, India, Germany and beyond. The community itself also runs a range of events including a regular working class writers' group, Queer Tech meet-up and technologies of resistance reading group. Watershed, supported by Bristol+Bath Creative R+D, are currently scoping opening a new immersive gallery in the Undershed space by the current box office which will connect our creative technology work to public audiences at a whole new scale.

#### **Ensuring that the Studio is a place of active and available participation.**

In the last year we have done extensive work to ensure the Studio is a key and visible part of the Watershed programme. Open Studio Friday, Lunchtime Talks (hybrid) and First Fridays now happen in the space (with an online element) and, responding to an acknowledged gap in provision, we run Producer Wednesdays every week as a way of connecting the many people working in these roles around the city to each other and our community. This all contributes to our intention of supporting 'R&D you can see', demystifying the process of making art with technology for audiences and ensuring that the work made at the Studio is relevant to their lives. Each year we undertake a

Balance and Belonging survey of our Residents – based on last year’s insights we have been focused supporting people’s sense of Voice and Belonging. The report of this year’s data will be published in December.

## **Resident Annual Survey headlines** (102 Respondents, 24 less than last year)

Every year we undertake a survey of our residents to understand what value they get from the studio and to analyse the make up of our community. The headlines:

- Total annual turnover £3,919,299, approximately £3m less than the previous year
- Average resident turnover is £38.5k, approximately £11.5k less than the previous year
- Total funding leveraged £2,318,650
- Employees (includes freelancers) 258
- Audience reached 129,060,725

*My current working model of getting all my income as a freelancer/project by project basis is no longer working. I think the cost of living etc has been a huge factor, as no matter how much I work it never seems to be enough. I do so many applications I have little time to work on my own practice (I've done 16 since start of 2023). So I'm currently applying for teaching work to supplement/be a 'bread & butter' income against my own practice. Pervasive Media Studio Resident, 2022/23 Resident Survey*

We currently have 181 Residents. We can see from their responses to our annual survey that they have been hard hit by the current economic climate. Back in 2020 the Guardian predicted that the creative sector would see twice the economic impact of COVID when compared to any other UK sector. This was combined with a projected annual loss £74bn and the loss of 400,000 jobs in the sector. We are now seeing that, along with years of austerity, playing out. Many of our residents report having a difficult time securing funding, struggling to balance home and work life and having to take jobs to ensure a regular income. Despite this there have been many success stories during the year (see Resident Highlights below) and they have reached an extraordinary number of people with their work.

*Graduating from a kitchen table business to one that is surrounded by the energy and information of PMS has been invaluable in our working practise. Our micro business has specifically benefitted in mindset as well as the many introductions and inspiration that has come from meeting other residents. Pervasive Media Studio Resident, 2022/23 Resident Survey*

## **TALENT DEVELOPMENT**

*I am starting to really immerse myself in the idea of using technology alongside my creative practice, the pm studio has succeeded in de- mystifying what tech is, and what it could be, expanding possibilities, especially being someone who is working class, I didn't know anything about tech, I felt I wouldn't ever know about tech, and even when I first stepped through the pm studio doors I thought.. well I don't think I'm knowledgeable enough, or maybe I need a degree.. but the studio is such a supportive, collaborative and inclusive space of so many different types of people and professions, its been a huge eye opener, and the pm studio are to credit for this. Pervasive Media Studio Resident, 2022/23 Resident Survey*

### **Artist Residencies**

We recruited three fantastic artists - [Ashley Peevor](#), [Deanna Rodger](#) and [Kexin Liu](#) as part of this years' Winter Residencies programme. Responding to the theme of 'Making the World Differently', their ideas spanned; a living costume made from local plants, an online zine exploring the link between attention and effective climate action and an interactive poetry machine that tells possible futures. Our selection process this year experimented with Random Selection to shortlist applicants (who were then paid to write a full application and visit the Studio for an interview). We published a series of blog posts to share our learnings and reflections, including an Unpaid Labour Calculator to enable others to consider the unpaid cost of recruitment, a tool that has garnered a lot of positive feedback.



Grass Man (Image Credit: Ashley Peevor)

### **Freelancer Fortnight**

We ran an inaugural [Freelancer Fortnight](#) as part of The Future is Collective programme, offering development workshops for 43 freelance creatives. We had fantastic engagement across the fortnight with practitioners returning for multiple sessions. We also hosted a beautiful celebration of the work, exploring themes of community, climate and identity. You can see the films, podcast, zine and article that were shared [here](#).

### **Work Experience**

*It's given me the confidence that I am able to independently produce things, as well as learning about other jobs in the creative industry. I have thoroughly enjoyed having my work experience in such a wonderful place, along with many helpful and pleasant people. Thank you :)* Year 10 Work Experience participant, July 2022

We hosted a fortnight of work experience for 15 very diverse students spanning years 10-13 from 9 schools across Bristol. We offered an eclectic programme spanning film, creative technology, sustainability and storytelling. The programme included visual storytelling, photography, solar punk and conductive ink workshops, an introduction to projection and Bristol's Bad Film Club, thinking about research as a career, a tour of the Old Vic, plus each participant created their own artwork on a theme of their choice. Attendees reported an increase in confidence, knowledge and next steps as a result of the programme.

### **Make Shift**

Our [new monthly drop in session](#) for 18-30 year olds kicked off at Pervasive Media Studio in May 2022. The sessions are designed to connect participants with film and creative technology practice. Each month a member of the Studio or our wider networks share their practice and career path, followed by an open invitation to work and network.

Across our work this year, we supported 547 participants who are just starting out in their creative careers and ran 227 events that reached audiences of 11,868 with learning material (these figures includes lunchtime talks, Make Shift workshops and other Talent Development activity).

## **MAJOR RESEARCH COLLABORATIONS**

Pervasive Media Studio plays a key role in connecting the arts sector to research and innovation; positioning artists in positions of intellectual leadership and creating opportunities for their work that they might not otherwise be able to access. This year we welcomed University of Bristol's new Centre for Creative Technologies into the Studio and launched a series of Alternative Technologies workshops, bringing together interdisciplinary researchers from both Universities with residents for day long speculative design workshops around areas of critical interest such as the Metaverse and Artificial Intelligence . We also developed a number of new large scale bids together, including for the



UK Research Council's (UKRI) UK CoStar Programme. Although this was not successful, we were the highest unfunded proposal, received excellent feedback and have been invited to continue a conversation with the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) about support for our 'visionary' ideas.

*There are not many spaces Black environmentalists can get together, talk and be in community with each other- that completely made the day.* Bristol+Bath Creative R+D participant (workshop run in partnership with Tiata Fahodzi)



Image Credit: Connecting Through Culture as We Age

**MyWorld** (led by University of Bristol, UKRI Strength in Places)

Building on the existing creative strength in the West of England region, [MyWorld](#) is exploring the future of creative technology innovation by pioneering new ideas, products and processes. Bringing together 13 diverse, world-leading partners across academia and industry, it invests in creative technology innovation to stimulate growth and societal change in the industry and in the region.

Pervasive Media Studio is a linchpin of the MyWorld programme. Our existing creative technology community provides a pool of public facing experimental practice for the Open Innovation, Audience and Network Development and Experimental Productions work packages in particular to draw from and feed into. The Studio hosts Fellows (who become Associate Residents), work in progress tests, training events, and public sharings. We have also leveraged our local, national and international networks to create opportunities for participants e.g. connecting the Immersive Audio Network to Real World Studios.

This year we launched [Playable City Sandbox](#) commissioning 6 new works for public space; Squeeze Me (Air Giants) uses inflatable soft robotic technology to create a compelling tactile experience, The House of Weaving Songs (dhaqan Collective) integrates Somali weaving songs into an interactive Somali-style nomadic structure, How (not) to be hit by a self-driving car (Tomo Kihara and Studio Playfool) is an AI based street game, Zoomscape Zoetrope (Jack Wates & Thomas Blackburn) is zoetropic light experience designed to be viewed from a moving train, Fireflies (Screaming Color and Arcane) is an AR piece layering visuals and local music and Street Pixel (Biome Collective) is playable hardware graffiti.

[Container](#) is an online magazine that takes a human look at technology, exploring how people use it for creative projects, community-building and social justice. Supported originally by South West Creative Technology Network and Bristol+Bath Creative R+D, it is now being part funded by MyWorld. This year Container published pieces on (among other things) cloud computing, live performance post lockdown, living archives, VR and digital activism, attracting 6,500 engagements.

### **Bristol+Bath Creative R+D** (led by UWE Bristol, AHRC Creative Economies programme)

Watershed produced the [Here+There pathfinder](#) from Pervasive Media Studio with 4 commissions for companies to develop their work internationally (connecting our cluster to Canada, Australia, the Netherlands and Nigeria). We also co-produced an enquiry with Made Culture in Lagos, a company set up by Creative Producers International alumnus Malaika Toyo. This brought together a cohort of creatives in Bristol and Lagos, via two online labs, to respond to provocations around responsible innovations in creative technology. We also released the [Creative Climate Action Toolkit](#) aimed at supporting freelance artists and creative SMEs. This was an output of action research done through one-to-one workshops with Residents and the wider community. It has been shared at events (e.g. Beyond, Attitude is Everything, Bristol Green Capital partnership) and has 1134 online interactions to date. Julie's Bicycle named Watershed as a 2023 Creative Climate Leader, inviting Zoe Rasbash (Climate Researcher) to their leadership programme.

Bristol+Bath Creative R+D programme activity came to an end in March 2023 (evaluation and reporting is ongoing). Born out of the Pervasive Media Studio partnership, between 2018 and 2023 we spent £3.4M supporting creative research and development. We engaged with 332 creative companies and freelancers and awarded £1.6 million directly to creatives across more than 140 investments. This led to £20.2 million in further co-investment in our creative ecosystem, 18 new businesses, 82 new jobs, 72 prototype products or services, 34 international collaborations, 634 public appearances, 229 early career researchers supported, 320+ blogs, reports, and other outputs, 1.5m+engagements with the public. We shared the work of our whole programme in a final showcase, titled [Hopeful Futures](#), over a two-day period in Bath and Bristol, welcoming 186 guests to explore questions about creative technology, research and society.

In January 2023 we also submitted two successful follow-on funding bids, securing a total of £447,535.57 to connect creative technology to climate action (Grounding Technologies) and invest in capital infrastructure for immersive production and exhibition (including Undershed).

### **Connecting though Culture As We Age** (led by University of Bristol, UKRI Healthy Ageing Challenge programme)

[Connecting though Culture As We Age](#) is exploring how and why we take part in arts and culture as we get older. Working alongside disabled older adults and those that identify as socioeconomically and racially minoritized we are co-designing new creative technology products, services and experiences. Following a 6-month process involving 53 co-designers (including older adult co-researchers in collaboration with creative technologists, artists, designers and our charity and community partners), [we commissioned 6 teams](#) to create new prototypes. These include a multi-sensory at home dining experience, augmented textiles and zines/sound pieces that explore experiences of the wash house.

## **RESIDENT HIGHLIGHTS**

*PM Studio opened up a new way of thinking, working, doing and being for me back in 2017 and it's never stopped since. There's nowhere else like the Studio and it's community and I really value being a part of it. If I hadn't had the opportunity to become a resident in 2017 I never would've believed I could do any of this. I might not visit the studio that much but when I do it feels like home and that I have found my people...* Pervasive Media Studio Resident, 2022/23 Resident Survey

Our residents are an extraordinary source of ingenuity and inspiration. Despite the challenges discussed above they have created and shared new products and experiences at the intersection of art, technology and society in ways that create wide ranging impact. Below are just a few examples from their work this year.



Jasmine Butt (Image Credit: Simon Holliday)

### Local to global

- Air Giants: Giant Tactile Robots was supported through MyWorld, they had their first international show, Unfurl at Tai Kwun in Hong Kong, and began a new collaboration with King's College London, showing in the KCL Science Gallery.
- Shrouk El-Attar: as well as getting a DYCP grant for a continuation of the belly dancing robot project which began during their Artist Residency with us, their team delivered 90 queer friendly therapy sessions in Egypt, awarded seed funding for two queer Arabs who were discriminated against in employment to start their own businesses and created positive queer online content that reached over 100,000 views. They have also been successful at getting the first ever transgender woman in Egypt have her gender legally changed on all her documents.
- Alison Neighbour: The (Future) Wales Coast Path ran throughout the year, causing real change in attitudes towards coastal flooding for Monmouth County Councillors. Showcased at the Prague Quadrennial international festival of performance design along with Beacons (from 2021), the lighthouse installations have been permanently homed in Somerset and Newport.

### Practice-based research

- Lisa May Thomas: has a new post as Senior Research Associate with Centre for Sociodigital Futures, at University of Bristol. They also received new funding from Bristol Digital Futures Institute for their immersive piece SOMA.
- Katy Connor: presented their HydroPoetics work (supported through a previous Artist Residency) at: Generous Food Futures (Bricks), Making Place for Plants (Brigstow Institute), Environmental Futures (Queen Mary University). They have also published academic papers, and won research residencies alongside a Brigstow grant.
- Owain Astles: currently working with the Brigstow Institute on a documentary research project about using a participatory development process to create stories with people that have lived experience of the UK prison system.

### Learning and Participation

- Euella Jackson: the Studio introduced her to the Wildscreen team, who gave her first wildlife presenting gig leading the way for the presenting work she has gotten with BBC and WWF this year.
- Constance Fleuriot: ran a Grrrls Into Games work experience week in July 2022, resurrected GrrrlGames meetup in 2023 in the Studio and ran a series of creative labs with Voices and with ARA.
- Stand + Stare: developing their WWT project Generation Wild, reaching thousands of school children across the UK and connecting them with nature. Meanwhile their chat bot for Houses of Darkness is being used



across Europe and they will shortly open a permanent exhibit, Engineering Reimagined, at the new Wonderlab at the National Railway Museum.

### **Civic engagement**

- Ella Good and Nicki Kent; launched The Martian House. A project that has been three years in the making and is a full scale construction of what a Martian House would look like. It was outside Mshed through Summer 2022 attracting large numbers of visitors and was featured on the front page of the Guardian Culture magazine.
- Harmeet Chagger-Khan: was commissioned with her company Surfing Light Beams (and Crossover Labs) to make Time Travel Tram, an 360 immersive experience telling the stories of the West Midlands for Birmingham 2022 at Commonwealth Games. They reached 176,000 people over the summer of 2022. We worked with 12 artists, commissioned 5 original soundtracks, engaged with 96 participants in schools and community groups. There were 4 archive partners (BFI, MACE, Black Country Living Museum and Sandwell Archives) and 5 engagement partners (Beatfreaks, Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, Birmingham Music Archive, Flatpack and Creative Black Country).
- Studio Susegad: the Bristol+Bath Creative R+D Digital Placemaking fellowship helped resident Roseanna Dias to conceive of and found Studio Susegad - a new home for production in Bristol and beyond with a focus on creating together while centring rest, care and connection. They have a new community consultation package to offer businesses that was co-developed and piloted within Watershed, looking at their values and visioning the next 40 years.

### **Reaching wide audiences**

- Squidsoup and Roxana: we have a ACE funded UK tour of our Vilk Collective / Squidsoup show called Circle which received prototype funding through Bristol+Bath Creative R+D and relationships built through the expanded performance fellowship
- Tim X Atack: Babel's Cupid has been co-commissioned by Bristol Old Vic, directed by Tanuja Amarasuriya. The album of songs from Sleepdogs' dream-pop odyssey A Million Tiny Glitches was released. Short story broadcast on Radio 4 called The Computer Who Failed At Maths. Several official Doctor Who audio adventures released by Big Finish, including Salvation Nine starring Chris Eccleston.
- Uninvited Guests: alongside Duncan Speakman, the team undertook a Perform Europe funded tour of Billennium and To Those Born Later to Bilbao, Budapest and Belgrade last year. This project is an evolution of Give Me Back My Broken Night developed in the Studio and supported through our Layered Realities collaboration with University of Bristol. The team have also shown Future Soundings as part of a Policy Lab and Defra Futures event to rethink future visioning methods.

## **EQUALITY, DIVERSITY, INCLUSION**

An inclusive Pervasive Media Studio is one where all individuals are treated fairly and respectfully, have access to opportunities and resources, and can contribute to the community's success. The Studio reviews both the demographic balance of the community and their sense of belonging once a year through a carefully designed survey. Because of the relatively low number of people in the community, and our commitment to confidentiality, we are not sharing the raw data but Watershed's Head of Data, the Executive Producer, Studio Community Lead and Inclusion Producer look



B&BR&D Hopeful Futures Event (Image Credit: Jon Aitken)

through all of the detail and take the headlines and our recommendations to the Studio's governance group.

Building on [last year's report](#) findings, this year we focussed on supporting people's sense of Voice and Belonging; offering space for people to share what they think and to connect to each other in a way that works for them. We designed and facilitated spaces while paying particular attention to how we might enable those who identify as 'Racially or Ethnically minoritised' and/or 'Neurodivergent' to fully participate.

- Studio lunch: this is our most open invitation to Residents but needed some re-energising after multiple lockdowns. Our Studio Coordinator has taken on holding this space as a warm and friendly way to connect with low expectation.
- Community Conversations are a new quarterly event where we bring people together to discuss issues of shared interest from different perspectives. They are chaired by the Executive Producer with a clear and careful structure to enable respectful challenge. To date we have discussed NFTs and Crypto-Currency and Faith & Technology.
- At the Annual Gathering this year we ran group discussions around two key ideas of the Studio: generous and interruptible (what do we mean by this? who might this idea exclude?) and community of exchange (how do we negotiate financial reward/recognition in a community that seeks to raise up many forms of value?). We also held a space for people to come and talk about the Balance and Belonging survey insights.
- We launched our plan to bring Resident voices into Studio governance via Resident Reps. We will pay two Residents for 10 days to work alongside us in developing a proposal for how our structure can better reflect the make-up of our community.

These actions are in addition to our ongoing commitments e.g. using inclusive recruitment and commissioning processes, offering Access Riders to all residents, signposting to our Quiet desks and Quiet Room for those needing time away from the busy Studio space, asking all Residents to sign up to our Inclusive Behaviour Commitments. Watershed's commitment to keep our brilliant Inclusion Producer Tony Bhajam beyond Bristol+Bath Creative R+D is strengthening and deepening our work.