

Institution: University of Reading		
Unit of Assessment: 32 Art & Design: History, Theory and Practice		
Title of case study: Reading International: Using art projects to inspire local communities to engage with contemporary art		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2007 – 2020.		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Susanne Clausen	Reader Professor of Fine Art	01/08/07 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2017 – 2020.		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Reading's location as a commuter town (30 minutes away from London by train), means that it frequently loses new artistic talent to the capital where studio space is more widely available and where there is a strong, funded, professional infrastructure for the arts with international connections. While there is pride for local activities in Reading, there is only a small-scale 'art scene' or art industry for its workers to benefit from; Reading's local arts economy struggles as a result of lack of funding and infrastructure and it is reliant on volunteers who run local art groups. A barrier faced by local artists in Reading has been the almost complete lack of studio and exhibition space, which denied artists the opportunity to work in professional circumstances and to develop more extensive professional networks. This means that there is limited scope for professionalisation or career progression in the fine arts in Reading. Susanne Clausen's practice-based research has changed this by developing a network of local and national collaborations. This approach has successfully changed people's perceptions about "how" and "where" to exhibit contemporary art. In addition, by working in partnership with ArtLab – an art and technology outreach facility at the University of Reading – Clausen has brought a large number of children and young people from diverse socio-economic backgrounds into contact with cutting-edge artwork.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Clausen's practice-based research explores the curation of art in unusual settings. Since 2004 Clausen has been curating art to make it accessible and part of the "everyday". As part of the art collective Szuper Gallery, Clausen produced <i>Liftarchiv</i> (output 1) which consisted of a glass elevator made for the Munich local administration office containing an art project which changed throughout the exhibition to reflect issues around immigration and law and order (for which the office was responsible). Building on her experience of curating art in unusual spaces, Clausen has been working on collaborative curatorial programmes with Alun Rowlands (University of Reading) since 2007. The curatorial method here involved commissioning high-profile international artists into different local partner venues, with each project creating a different challenge or scenario to question possibilities for engagement with local history and the community. Collaborative partners included local arts organizations, educational partners, local businesses, museums, galleries and archives.</p> <p>Building on her practice-based research into curating and making art accessible, in 2017 Clausen's research project Reading International (RI) was successful in winning a 3 year "Ambition for Excellence" Award from the Arts Council England (ACE), with additional funding from Reading Borough Council. Reading International was established to develop and test the creation of a liminal space between an art school, a regional arts community and an international</p>		

contemporary art network. By inviting artists to respond to the specific social and historical framework offered by the art school and the town, the project explored how we can imagine the art school in a university as a public arena, which opens its life beyond the academic community and actively engages with a wider public. Could the art school become a catalyst to create a speculative thinking space, erasing hierarchical (and economic) divisions between the educational environment and wider publics? RI aimed to create a space that is less separated from the professional public, where artists collaborate with students and the community to create a dynamic cultural space in a regional environment.

RI consolidated the place-orientated work that Clausen had been researching; over a 3-year period, it delivered more than 60 events to 43,000 people and conducted workshops with over 1,000 participants in and around Reading. During that time, the project team has worked with 65 internationally acclaimed artists and 70 community partners (output 2). The aim of these partnerships was to transform artistic ambition and audience expectation in the region and to develop leadership within the local arts community. RI commissioned major solo exhibitions, group and thematic shows, performances, film screenings, workshops and talks as well as offsite projects and temporary public artworks. Each year RI delivered several major projects, each with a different artist, venue and local organisation, which provided a platform to make new work in response to the unique social and historical context of Reading. RI also worked closely with ArtLab, a dedicated art and technology facility at the University of Reading which supports outreach and widening participation in the arts, to bring a wide range of children and young people from different socio-economic backgrounds into contact with cutting edge artwork.

The outcomes of Clausen's research for RI (outputs 3 & 4) highlight the importance of 'collective improvisation' from all partners involved in such collaborative production and curation of contemporary art works. Clausen's research has tested, trialled and pushed the boundaries of traditional professional/local collaborations. The place-orientated nature of her work is reflected in the itinerant aspect of RI's production, where exhibitions and events "pop up" all across the town and surrounding area which allows art to be accessible in everyday life across the Reading area.

3. References to the research

The research meets or exceeds the threshold for 2* originality, significance and rigour. It resulted from a competitive funding application and was published in peer-reviewed publications (outputs 3-4) or as commissioned practice-based research (outputs 1-2). Clausen's research has served as a catalyst for significantly novel creative collaborations between artists, curators and partner venues.

1. Clausen, S. (ed) *Liftarchiv*, Revolver Publishing (2007). <https://liftarchiv.de> and <https://legacy.liftarchiv.de/2008/download/Liftarchiv.pdf>
2. Clausen, S. (2017-20). *Reading International* project portfolio CentAUR ID: <http://centaur.reading.ac.uk/84437/>
3. *Reading International*, Published by OnCurating Books, 2020, ISBN:978-1-912115-68-6 https://www.on-curating.org/book/reading-international.html#.YDkJyc_7Q1J
4. Clausen, S. (2020). *Reading International – Propositions for developing a collaborative art space in the intersection between art school and community*, OnCurating ISSN 2673-2904 <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/542734/542735>

4. Details of the impact

A. Engaging diverse audiences with contemporary art in and around Reading

RI has engaged with diverse audiences delivering more than 60 events to 43,000 people and conducting workshops with over 1,000 participants; the project team has worked with 65 internationally acclaimed artists (from the UK, Canada, USA, Ukraine, Israel, Spain and Belgium) and 70 community partners and local artists, including Reading Library, Reading Museum, Broad Street Mall, Greenham Common Tower, South Street, the Rising Sun Arts Centre and Jelly (E1). These interactions and partnerships have changed how art is viewed in the local area, staff at Reading Central Library commented: "Before, art was only on the wall. This time the art was very

interactive, artists were part of the exhibition, they animated the exhibition”; A teacher at a local school described how “this kind of performative art really opened my eyes [...] and opened the students’ mind to the world”, while the Operations Manager at Broad Street Mall observed that RI was providing opportunities for more art and culture to be brought to the town in order to “spike the community’s interests” (E1).

B. Facilitating professional networks and international collaborations

Reading has a small number of long-standing community arts organisations, whose focus is to support its local base of artists, most of whom struggle to make a living within the arts. Like many regional towns, Reading’s numerous artists and cultural workers find themselves based outside the typical art centres (such as London) where they lack exhibition and studio space and connections to the art community. Artists take pride in local arts activities but there is no “art scene” and there is no art industry for its workers to benefit from. RI has reignited Reading’s art scene by facilitating engagement and collaborations between international artists and local community artists and art groups, raising the perceived value of art and artists in the local area.

One local art collective, the volunteer run [Rising Sun Arts Centre](#) has completely transformed its ambitions and ways of working as a result of engaging with RI. The networking opportunities allowed for the Rising Sun’s volunteers to become “more engaged” with the wider artistic community in Reading, becoming “more aware of the wider art scene” and how the Rising Sun’s work fits in to this; as a direct result “the centre has become less introspective”. The [RI Summit](#) at the Tate Exchange (2018) was instrumental in allowing the Rising Sun Arts Centre to address what it wanted its future to look like and the audiences it wanted to engage with. The [Abel Auer exhibition](#) (2017) has allowed the Rising Sun to plan for a major redevelopment of their space and “remains an example of how ambitious” the centre wants to be with exhibitions moving forwards (E2). The networking opportunities afforded by RI have allowed for new types of art collective to be established in the area. For example, the community art group Jelly have hosted and mentored recent University of Reading graduates as part of the network who have gone on to form the collective [Double Okay](#). Double Okay have in turn established a performance collective, using nightclub and [online venues](#) (E3).

C. Impact on funding and infrastructure for contemporary art in Reading

There is enthusiasm in towns such as Reading, which is culturally diverse and unique, to create an exciting cultural offer, but resources and professional structures are slim. The town has two museums which both have a local and historical focus, but it lacks a contemporary art gallery, let alone one that exhibits international artworks. The local arts economy is based purely on a large community of volunteers who organise cultural events and activities in the town. The impact of RI has gone some way to address these issues by garnering community support and securing funding for more space for contemporary art in the town.

Following RI’s partnership with the Artangel exhibition *Inside at Reading Prison* (2016), several community groups, with support from two local MPs, have campaigned for the old Reading Prison site to be maintained as a multi-media arts centre with theatre, exhibition and studio space. A local petition was signed by more than 6,000 people and there were explicit requests for a contemporary art space as part of the site. In late 2020, Reading Borough Council was working to acquire the site from the Ministry of Justice for use as a community arts centre. This has led other local cultural organisations to engage with contemporary artwork and to plan exhibitions as part of their future programming. A public workshop with Helen Cammock led to the creation of a series of prints for which Reading Borough Council provided space for 300m of hoarding in the centre of town. After the success of the Helen Cammock prints (exhibited in Crown Street, Reading), Reading Museum, with support from the Reading Foundation for Art, has purchased further prints which are now on display. This is the first time that Reading Museum has purchased high profile contemporary art and also the first-time contemporary artwork has been displayed in Reading Central Library (E4).



Through RI, Clausen has worked with local businesses and cultural venues, including Broad Street Mall, the Oracle Shopping Centre, Thames Tower, Munchees Café and Reading Abbey, to open up more spaces for art, some for the first time. The project has enabled local businesses and venues to rethink their programming and build stronger relationships with the local arts community. These developments have provided enhanced infrastructure for cultural events and the creation of a “What’s On” listing for Reading which showcases local arts, cultural and heritage events taking place in and around Reading (E5). Reading Borough Council has also offered £5,000 to RI in follow-on funding to support further community arts projects in the local area (E6). In recognition of the contribution to changing local cultural policy and ambition, RI won Reading’s “Best cultural organisation of the year” Award in 2019 (E7). RI has been invited to join the [Contemporary Visual Arts Network](#) and the [Reading Heritage Action Zone](#), both of which provide opportunities to extend and sustain RI.

D. Working with young people to increase aspirations and promote self-care

Reading town has a socio-economically diverse population, added to which schools vary greatly in providing opportunities for pupils to engage with contemporary art. RI has challenged this inequality and engaged with approximately 1000 learners across Key Stages 1 – 5 (ages 4-18); in several cases producing tangible, positive behavioural changes as a result. The collaboration between RI and ArtLab has increased awareness of art as a viable career path among young people. ArtLab has introduced younger pupils to the programmes offered by RI and RI has commissioned work that helped improve the well-being of secondary school pupils (E8). For example, “Nightwalks with Teenagers” (5 & 6 October 2018) improved confidence in the young people (aged 13-14) involved who, in many cases, were engaging with an extra-curricular activity for the first time. This particular project saw RI collaborate with the internationally renowned Canadian group “Mammalian Diving Reflex” to help young people reclaim part of Reading’s urban landscape for themselves, putting them at the centre of the narrative. RI has also raised awareness of mental health issues and self-care among young people through the collaborative “I Care” workshops (1 August 2019 – 20 February 2020) with Ultra-red, a sound artist activist collective who worked with students aged 14-15 from the Maiden Erlegh School in Reading to explore issues such as identity, citizenship, mental health and wellbeing (E9).

RI has successfully bridged the gap between a university art school and the local community, highlighting that local art does not have to be provincial and solely led by volunteers. By securing funding, establishing an effective infrastructure and facilitating international collaborations, RI has reshaped how local communities, including school pupils from less advantaged backgrounds, want to interact with cutting-edge contemporary art works.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- [E1]** Reading International impact presentation with participant feedback.
- [E2]** Email from the Rising Sun Arts Centre.
- [E3]** Website and online event from new art collective.
- [E4]** Reading Library and Helen Cammock comment
- [E5]** What's On Listing
- [E6]** Letter from Reading Borough Council
- [E7]** Reading International "Reading's Best Cultural Organisation" of the Year (2019)
- [E8]** Interviews from ArtLab participants & testimonials from teachers
- [E9]** Feedback from I-Care with Ultra-red.