



## PhD Horizons Conference 2018

### Panel 2A: Creative Industries

#### **Dr Suzanne Parry, Freelance Composer, Arts Consultant and Tutor**

Suzanne gained her PhD in Music by Composition Portfolio, at the University of Edinburgh in 2011. She has worked as a freelance contemporary classical composer since completing her Masters at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama in 2004. Suzanne also works in Higher Education as both a composition tutor and PhD Skills Development Consultant.

After her masters, Suzanne was based in Wales and was getting a decent amount of work, but at one point things stagnated. She had previously met Prof. Nigel Osbourne, Reid Professor in Music at University of Edinburgh who had asked her to come and do a PhD. She wasn't keen at that point but a year passed and she realised she need some support to get her career on track. She called Nigel and was lucky to receive the CAHSS award, so essentially viewed her PhD as a free 3 year incubator period to refocus, and expand her network. It was an opportunity to reframe her work and rethink her plans.

Since her PhD she has been based in Scotland with a little bit of international work. She spends most of her time writing music, does a small amount of tutoring here at UoE which she really enjoys, and has also embarked on a project to pay it forward and support younger composers, by establishing a skills training consultancy for PhD students in interdisciplinary arts. Her inspiration for this was the support she received from IAD whilst at UoE.

So, she has a portfolio career, as is common in the creative sector. She described this as a series of cogs which are mostly turning separately, as discrete pieces of work. She talked of wearing different hats, and encountering difficulties when cogs sometimes stick, and it being her responsibility to ensure the whole system keeps turning, she can't let a problem in one area spill into others. She reflected that managing a portfolio career is quite similar to managing yourself, and your time & priorities, during your PhD.

She spoke about the dips you sometimes encounter as a freelancer – questioning if you are doing ok, being boosted by a recent project, then questioning yourself again, and having to keep pushing yourself forwards.

She mentioned that an ability to self-critique and quality control your output is a key transferrable skill you gain from your PhD.

She spoke of the importance of building your network - most of work she gets now is via her network. She urged PhD students to make friendships with UGs and masters students too, not just other PhD students. These people will all go in interesting directions after the leave the University - most don't stay in academia. Many of the people she met went on to be contacts who offer her work. Her advice was to think laterally about your network – think of the whole student community as your peers.

As a freelancer in the Creative Industries, things that come up you may not have done before, but if you think you could probably do it you have to say let's give it a go. If you think you might be capable of something say yes and work out the details later – it is important to keep pushing yourself, and if it goes well, you've got a new skill/experience to put on your CV.

What made her go down the freelancer route?





She wanted to have creative freedom, had always identified as a practitioner and her career path has been shaped by her family. She started her PhD single and ended it married with a 5 month old baby. She wanted to be present in family life and felt an early career research role didn't fit with that. Decided she would give herself 5 years to develop her portfolio career – she's got another 18 months of that still to go.

Being a Creative Freelancer is a hard career path – often about being last one standing, and dealing with a lot of difficult rejection.

Talked about support she received from IAD, strongly recommend taking advantage of that support, particularly the Ingenious Women course <https://www.ed.ac.uk/institute-academic-development/research-roles/research-only-staff/leadership-in-research/women>

She realised that she was intrigued not only by what the IAD staff and courses were able to offer for her, but more generally she was interested in the role they were undertaking. She wanted to replicate giving that kind of support, and she is now doing that through a project with University of Glasgow – that is the consultancy “cog” of her portfolio career.

Her final tips were around thinking of yourself as a brand if you are a freelancer – everything matters – how you come across in real life, your friendship circles, your social media, your work relationships. At the base level, do people like and trust you? Networking is everything. Be careful of burning bridges. Remember a PhD is more than just a thesis – think of everything else you gain in the process, but also the fact you have a PhD isn't what defines you, it's not all of who you are.

Always ask for feedback but only when you're ready to hear it

Consider your whole happiness not just your esteem. It doesn't mean you're a failure if you don't use your PhD in a set way or follow an academic career path.

### **Dr Ruth Bretherick, Research and Interpretation Curator, The Fruitmarket Gallery**

Ruth completed her PhD in History of Art at the University of Edinburgh in 2017. She has published in MIRAJ (Moving Image Review & Arts Journal), Tate Papers and The Sculpture Journal. She took up her current role with The Fruitmarket Gallery in November 2016, programming talks and panel discussions to enrich the content of each exhibition, writing and coordinating the exhibition interpretation materials and working in partnership with the University on the new MSc(R) in Collections and Curating Practices. She has worked as a History of Art Tutor with the University, a researcher on the ARTIST ROOMS Research Partnership (between the University, Tate and the National Galleries of Scotland), and as a freelance educator with the National Galleries of Scotland. She holds a BA (Hons) in History of Art from the University of Warwick and an MSc in Modern Art from the University of Edinburgh. Between her undergraduate and Masters Degrees she worked at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice, first as an intern, then staying on in a managerial capacity.

Ruth works in the Learning and engagement team – essentially on the adult learning programme. She is often inviting academics to come and speak about exhibitions/artists they have on. The

reason her job title has the word curator in the title is simply because academics respond better to that! The Director of the Fruitmarket is the curator of the Gallery.

She spends her time on interpretation activities like writing wall text guides, exhibition guides, collates related books, video of artists talking about the exhibition. The events





programme is part of Interpretation – often takes the form of panel discussions and talks in the gallery space – there is no dedicated education space at Fruitmarket.  
Also involved in the Open Out programme – essentially, what happens in between exhibitions – often interdisciplinary arts performances. This is an experimental form of programming for the Gallery

She also supports with Fruitmarket's input into the UoE MscR Collections and Curating Practices. Fruitmarket are one of 6 local arts organisations who contribute to that new course.

She spoke about what she likes about working in a Gallery environment. She gave examples of how there is sometimes some labour intensive work to be done that everyone pulls together with to support the installations team. She spoke of enjoying working towards shared goals with team. She enjoys thinking more widely about things – having to think about audiences and who might benefit from coming to the gallery. She likes that working in a public facing gallery gives her a chance to share her passion for art. She enjoys working directly with artists – this was new for her, but enjoys this exposure, although said that giving them the interpretation piece she has written about them can be nerve-wracking!

Advice from both speakers on how to explain the benefit of your PhD to organisations you are applying to:

- Mirror back what they ask for/are looking for
- Important to read and use their language and interpret it back to them – it's about redefining yourself in their terms, re-contextualising your skills/experience
- Remember to mention skills and experience from outside your PhD eg voluntary work

