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NOTE 13
EVALUATION REPORT FOR ICA'S KOKI TANAKA PROJECT

ARTWORKS LONDON

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1 SUMMARY: EVALUATOR'S PERSPECTIVE

The Koki project was a remarkable project that encapsulated, deconstructed and progressed debates that are central to Artworks:

- The ICA chose an artist of international standing for whom a participative approach was central to his form of artistic expression.
- The ICA carried on a long process of discussion, planning and preparation for a one day event through its usual process of curation.
- Staff from the ICA took part in the project on an equal basis with members of the public.
- The project was deliberately designed so that the artist was not transferring skills but rather sharing ideas and consciousness.
- The key questions were embedded in and emerged from the experience rather than being articulated to the participants as formal objectives.
- Issues of community were central to the activities and the discussion.
- The project took place in the gallery space of the ICA as well as in studio spaces and outside the building.

Altogether the Koki project embodied a series of provocations about the valuing of participative practice, which can be represented in these questions:

If we cared about participative practice, and gave it equal esteem to gallery work, would we:

- Choose artists of international standing?
- Choose artists for whom participatory values are central to their artistic expression?
- Foreground the artists' artistic development in the participative practice?
- Allow the projects to be artist-led?
- Find language to describe participatory practice which reflects how artists describe their own work? Koki Tanaka does not use the term 'participative practice'.
- Give artists a curator to provide support and space to develop their ideas?
- Value the projects for their depth not the contact hours? The Koki project took 24 hours.
- Value artists not just for their ability to transfer skills to participants but also for their ideas and way of thinking? Our previous evaluations suggest that audiences often value contact with artists for their insights to an extent not appreciated by all commissioners.
- Treat participants as equal to staff members? This is certainly an aspiration in many participative projects but is difficult to achieve in a didactic format.
- Hold projects in the main spaces of organisations, or in whichever spaces most suited the experience?

Although participatory projects are often delivered with dedication, passion and care, the Koki project asks whether they are subject to limiting assumptions that reflect their low status in the arts world.

2 ICA KOKI TANAKA PROJECT

2.1 Introduction

The ICA Koki project was being supported by ArtWorks London to examine these questions:

- Why is the term 'participative art' so problematic in contemporary arts? What are the barriers?
- What are the challenges of participative practice in a contemporary arts setting when your participants are unknown?
- How does/should the definition of participatory practice change when put into a gallery environment?
- Can socially engaged contemporary art, unconcerned with transferring skills or co-production, be defined as participatory practice?
- What is the role of the audience and what is the expectation upon them to engage in participative contemporary arts in a gallery setting?
- How do you train visual artists to deliver high quality participative arts in a gallery context where co-production and skills exchange is not a factor?

There were four elements to the project:

- Public event, 24 hours *Gathering* comprising: Reading to the public, communal tea drinking, discussion with *Riot From Wrong*, talk about *Sharing a Disaster with Others: Contemporary Japanese Art and the Utopian Promise of Tohoku*, and film screening of *Into Eternity*.
- Friday Salon, *Gallery as Community*, using Koki Tanaka's contribution to *Journal* project as a catalyst for reflection and debate, inviting contemporary visual artists to explore the issues surrounding participatory practice within the gallery context
- Online blog, to raise questions, encourage discussion and stimulate debate surrounding participative art in the gallery context.
- Private event, in which participants spend 24 hours together, recreating and reflecting on the feelings around of stranded kept in a building during the Tohoku earthquake in 2011.

2.2 Methodology

The methodology was:

- Analysis of reflection reports produced by observers.
- Analysis of online blog.
- Analysis of data on audience numbers and profile.
- Learning seminar at the project end.
- Online survey of audience members.

2.3 Impressions of the events

We have analysed the reports produced by Dominique Dunne and Maia Mackney from the Barbican to give insight into the events. The reports had these themes:

Reading to the public:

- **Intimacy.** “The act of reading aloud standing in a circle of strangers in a park open to the public is far from familiar and simultaneously creates a performative environment for an everyday ritual alongside giving that performance an intimate atmosphere.”
- **Exposure.** “In asking participants to select text to read Koki was asking them to bring something quite personal to a public event. People chose extracts which spoke of their interests, personality and past memories. Some people chose feminists texts, others philosophical texts. Many texts chosen spoke of their memories of childhood and were described as ‘comfort readings’. This jarred somehow with the potential uncomfortable experience of reading allowed to a group of strangers. The intimate experience of reading your extract together became an experience in introducing a little bit about yourself to the group. It cut through the getting to know you phase of a participatory exchange. Rather than saying ‘my name is.... and I was brought up in....and work with....’, by reading your extract you are telling a group of strangers ‘this is something that I value and that encapsulates something about who I am’.”
- **Memory.** “Memory was a recurring theme during the readings, memories of childhood, memories of when the book became significant to the reader. These reflections were often shared with the group and became a part of the experience. Indeed five extracts were chosen because they were a favourite from the reader’s childhood.”

Communal tea drinking:

- **Sociability.** The tea ceremony consisted of drinking tea which was a mix of all the tea bags bought by the participants. “It felt very ceremonial, ritualistic and traditional like we were at a wedding. Everyone politely took it in turns to get a cup, as if receiving communion at mass. After that everyone stayed in the space and socialised with each other for around 40 minutes. The communal tea drinking was a lovely thing to be part of/witness. It was a great way to meet some of the new people that had come along, and say goodbye to those who had been there a while. There was positivity to the room, a constant flow of conversation and energy. The task of drinking the tea made everyone socialise in a way they would with friends and families.”
- **Equality.** “There were no hierarchies between ICA staff, Koki, the participants in it for the duration of 24 hours, funders and observers only able to stay for the day. This is unique, unusual and not to be underestimated.”
- **Re-imagining the gallery space.** “I found the gallery setting quiet a strange location for the task. For me, being in the midst of the exhibition was surreal, unusual to be able to drink tea whilst walking around an exhibition. (I felt like I’d get in trouble!) Most people were interacting with the exhibition and discussing it.” “There is something significant in coming together with a group of strangers to share your personal space in a public environment. It changes both the environment of the gallery space or park alongside shifting the way you experience an intensely personal activity like reading or making tea.” “In his 24 hour gathering at the ICA in June 2014, Koki Tanaka played with how we experience both everyday objects and rituals and the gallery space throughout the day.”

Participants read aloud, ate lunch, made a cup of tea, discussed ideas, watched a film and slept dreaming alongside strangers. He achieved this by bringing everyday rituals to a public space and asking people to experience them with a group of strangers in a way which made the participants mindful of their everyday actions.”

- **Re-imagining the every day.** “It made the familiar experience of reading a beloved book or completing the ritual of making a mug of tea strange somehow by asking us to share it with a group. Making the familiar strange brings focus to everyday life and tasks. It brings an intensely personal experience (tea, reading, dreaming, sleeping) to a public space potentially making participants vulnerable.”
- **Removing barriers.** “Bringing homely comforting tasks to the strange space of the gallery might help to break down perceived spatial barriers that may exist for a participant unused to such an environment.”
- **Experience of tensions.** “The combination of empty shelving around us and the exhibition film playing on loop in the background made me feel like I was experiencing the aftermath of something terrible. Also the drinking of tea is something I deeply associate with consoling someone, or calming nerves, so at the same time of enjoying the experience I also felt a sense of foreboding.”

Riot from Wrong:

- **Informality.** “The talk was informal and more of a free flowing account of each individual’s experience of the riots than anything factual or structured. A lot of the conversation was focused on the disservice towards the portrayal of young people in the media.”
- **Expectations of seeing the film.** “The only confusion I had with the talk was that a trailer for *Riot From Wrong* was advertised on a projector behind them. The advert played on loop throughout the entire hour of the talk. It felt like the talk was leading up to watching at least part of the film, but it wasn’t.”

Film Screening: Into Eternity:

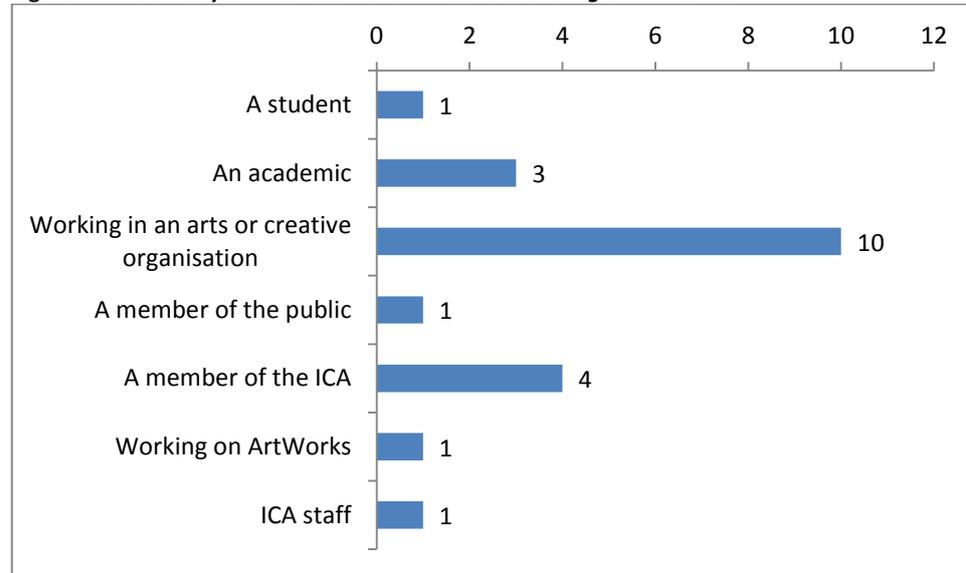
- **Insight.** “The storytelling was enchanting and poetic, the tone was dark humoured and the cinematography was uncommonly beautiful. I can’t speak for everyone but I learnt so much about a subject matter that I knew nothing about.”
- **Relaxation.** “I think Koki’s decision to include this film in the 24 hours was a great one. It was a nice relief, and contrast to the other acts. It offered well-deserved break from concentrating, and the humour in the film possibly relieved some tension.”

3 AUDIENCE SURVEY

3.1 Introduction

Respondents were a relatively expert group.

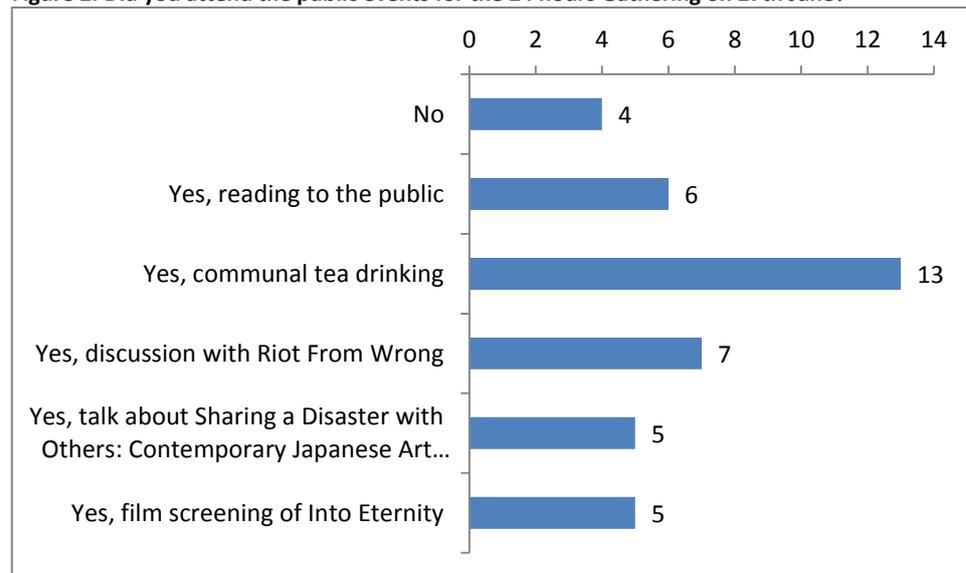
Figure 1: What was your interest in the 24 hours *Gathering* on 27th June?



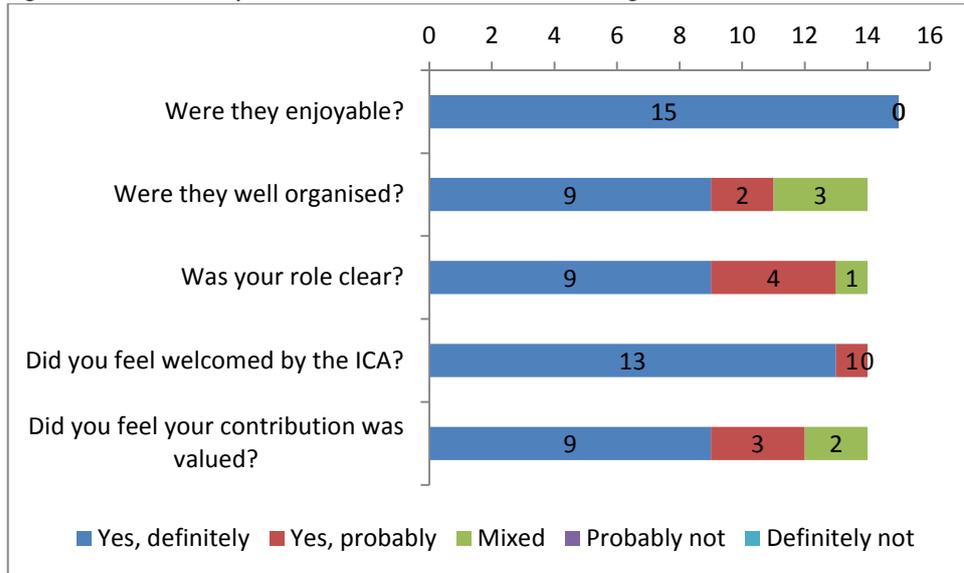
3.2 Public events

14 respondents attended the public events for the 24 hours *Gathering* on 27th June.

Figure 2: Did you attend the public events for the 24 hours *Gathering* on 27th June?



Events were unanimously seen as enjoyable and welcoming, and mainly well organised. There were no negative responses.

Figure 3: Views on the public events for the 24 hours *Gathering*

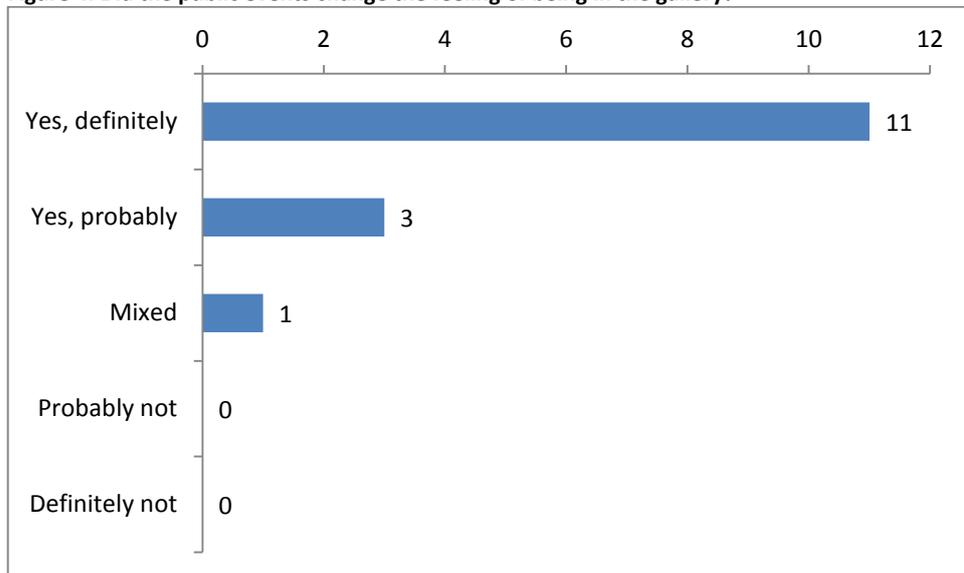
Respondents thought the public events changed the feeling of being in the gallery, bringing it to life and giving an open social element. One comment emphasised the value of the unexpected, which suggest some of the effect might be lost if these kinds of events became routine.

“It made the gallery space feel more alive, more responsive and reflective of the outside world. It was more engaging and interesting as a result of bringing in something unexpected.”

“The reading in the park was in a public space, and the communal tea drinking was a very different activity in the gallery, a collective encounter.”

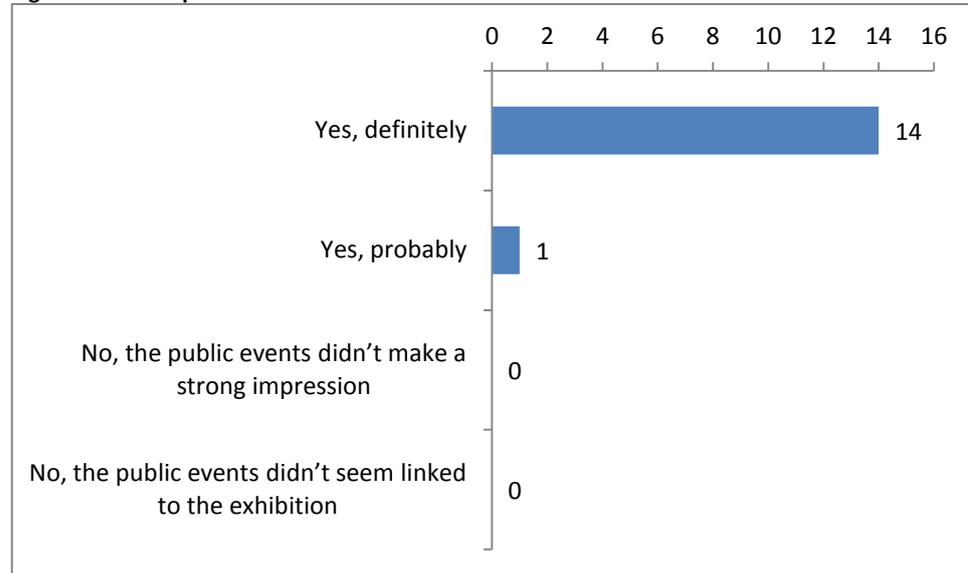
“Made me think how adaptable the space is.”

“The activity drew other people in who weren't necessarily there to attend the event.”

Figure 4: Did the public events change the feeling of being in the gallery?

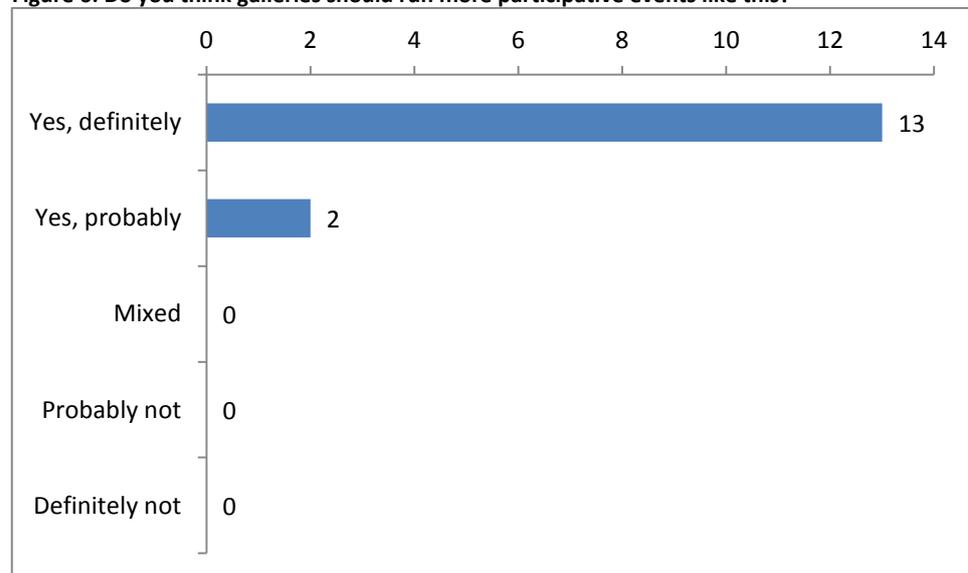
All respondents thought the public events enhanced the exhibition. None thought the public events seemed unconnected with the exhibition.

Figure 5: Did the public events enhance the exhibition?



“The public events allowed for an immerse experience and a practical engagement with the themes of the exhibition.”

Figure 6: Do you think galleries should run more participative events like this?



All respondents thought galleries should run more participative events like this. The reasons were:

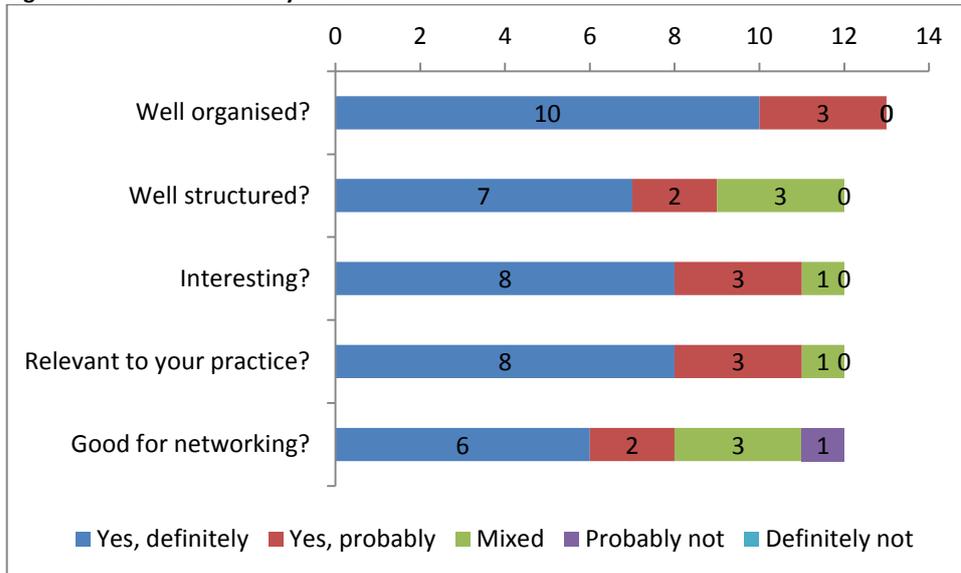
- **Accessibility.** “It makes the visual arts world more accessible to more people.”
- **Valuing participative practice.** “It raises the value of participatory practice and puts it on an equal level with 'professional art' - where it should be!”
- **Quality of engagement.** “It creates a dynamic atmosphere and encourages the public to engage with the work in new and interesting ways.” “Because it deters the gallery space from dividing the artist and the viewer, so the work can be accessed on a deeper level.”

- **Connection.** “It will make the public feel closer to the gallery.” “Sense of community coming together. Maybe the gallery should think of more active activities rather than constant talks.”
- **Need for change.** “It is essential to engage audiences in new and unusual ways, dislocating their expected experience.”
- **Contrast.** “When they work they provide a useful counterpoint, when they don’t work they provide a platform for helpful critique.”

3.3 Friday salon

15 respondents attended the Friday salon on 27th June. This was seen as well organised, relevant and interesting, but there were mixed views on whether it was well structured.

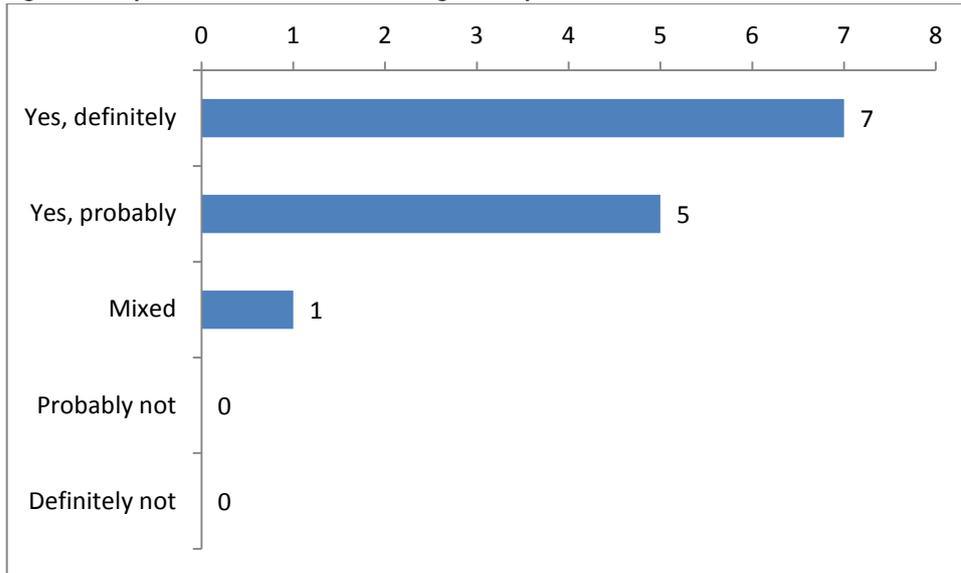
Figure 7: Views on the Friday salon



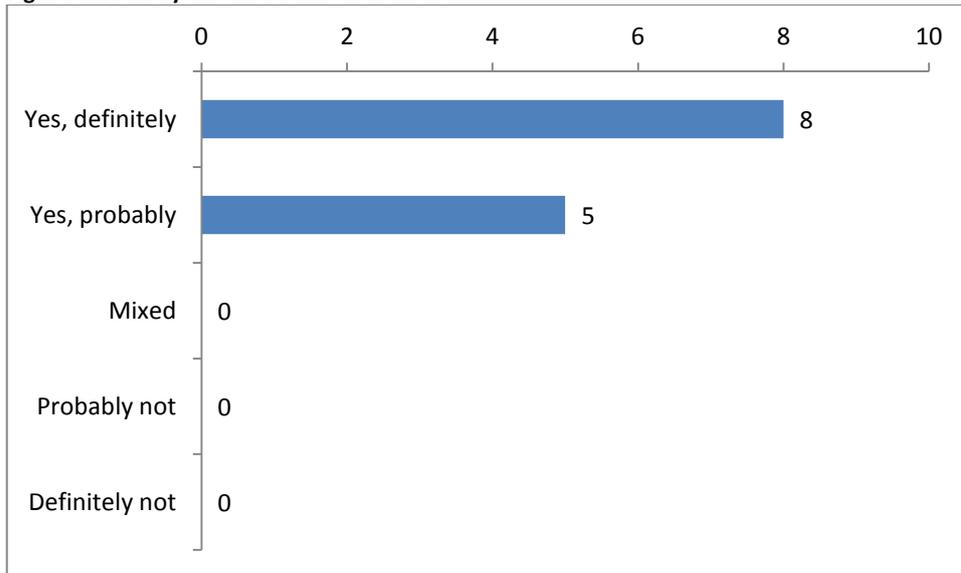
“The moment after the Salon was more interesting as the conversation opened up. More attention needed to be paid to the engagement of the audience and the configuration of the room to enable this. A chair was needed to ensure that the conversation stayed relevant.”

Respondents generally thought the salon model could be a good way to stimulate and document artists’ reflection so long as the speakers were carefully chosen and briefed in full, the room rearranged to be less formal, and structure changed to allow networking time or small group discussion.

“The Friday Salons have helped guided my interest (particularly in public programming). I feel that the artist is de-hierarchied, and made accessible.”

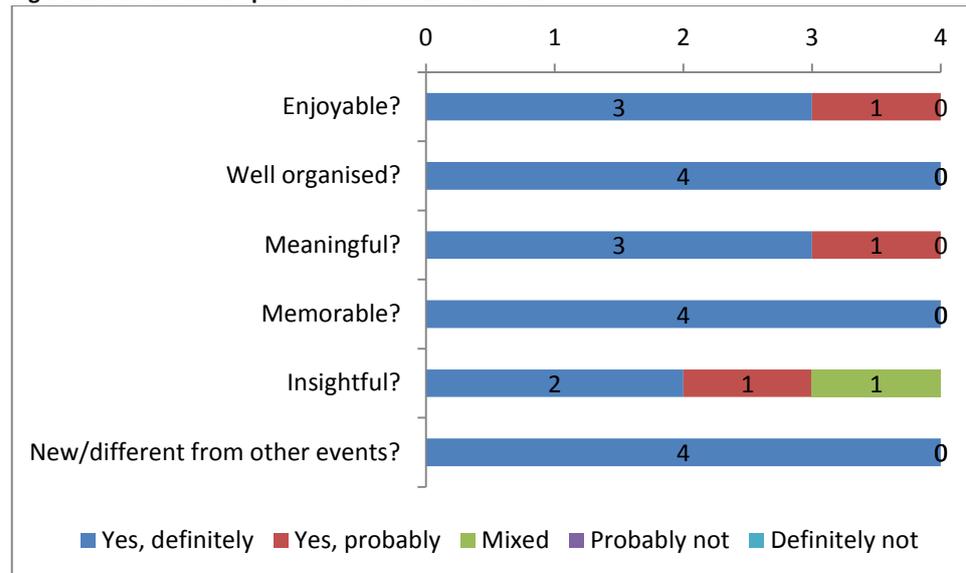
Figure 8: Do you think the salon model is a good way to stimulate and document artists' reflection?

All respondent said they would come to another salon.

Figure 9: Would you come to another salon?

3.4 Private event

Five respondents came to the night event on 27th/28th June. All described it as enjoyable, well organised, meaningful, memorable and new/different from other events. One person thought it gave insights into participative practice in a gallery setting. What worked well were the group bonding, joint sense of adventure/the extraordinary, and the name which eliminated communication barriers. What worked less well was the mixing of groups.

Figure 10: Views on the private event on 27th/28th June

3.5 Overall views

Respondents were asked about the attractions of running participative workshops in a gallery setting. Answers had these themes:

- **Deepening engagement.** “It provokes conversation and engagement with the concepts explored in the exhibitions and more broadly in the sector. It allows for a more in-depth understanding of local case studies.” “It activates the exhibits.”
- **Broadening audiences.** “As one of many locations that are inspiring, the gallery benefits from potential new audiences and participants benefit from the spaces and resources on offer.” “Opening up space to new audiences.”
- **Building relationships with audiences.** “Participatory workshops are a wonderful forum for a gallery to connect with its audience, to draw in ideas and knowledge from those people and to create relationships with people beyond the exhibition.”
- **Stimulating discussion.** “Enables structured conversations to emerge.” “Challenging curatorial vision. Discussion and making space alive and discursive.”
- **Changing preconceptions about galleries.** “Changes perceptions of how to 'act' / be, within art galleries.” “Participate in something unexpected, which gives out a more friendly perception than some gallery pretentious attitudes.”
- **Interacting with artists.** “A chance to interact with and meet artists, and others with similar interests and practices.”

What do you see as the challenges of running participative workshops in a gallery setting?

- **Persuading gallery staff.** “I think the main challenge is convincing the gallery staff of its value to the building and the programme. By its nature participatory practice is a risk, it is unclear as to what it will be and what will take place between the people engaging in the experience. For me this is the most exciting part - for institutions the inability to plan the experience completely makes them less likely to engage. It also requires more work and in-depth thinking - which may make it feel less cost effective to the institution.” “For

the gallery, there needs to be buy-in from all staff so that participants feel welcomed and heard.”

- **Communicating the difference.** “For people new to the gallery, there is the challenge of crossing the threshold.” “Hard to attract new audience in without a lot of leg work first.”
- **Reaching new audiences.** “Accessing audiences beyond those 'in the know'”
- **Moving beyond one-off events.** “Sustainability and growing relationships between all involved can also be a challenge.”
- **Feeling natural.** “Such conversations can feel forced or artificial.” “That they are somehow authentic and not tokenistic, that their motivations are made clear and transparent.”
- **Managing risk.** “There is always an element of risk in public programming, whether that is understanding the interests and needs from an audience, selecting artists, performers or speakers to participate or selecting appropriate material. However, these challenges can be addressed by considered planning and conversation with colleagues.” “Of course, the unpredictable nature of 'live'” “Maintaining a controlled but enjoyable and liberating atmosphere.”
- **Integration.** “Seeing participation as serving curatorial means not a practice separate from it.”
- **Thinking differently.** “Beyond the constraints of the exhibition as the usual background/ starting point.”