

# Curatorial Statement June 2020

## Bloc Projects

I am Sunshine Wong, the Public Programme Coordinator at Bloc Projects. I am updating our curatorial statement in June 2020, during these “strange and unprecedented times”. It’s a description that’s repeated over and over, but while it captures a feeling of disorientation, it really says nothing at all. I would like to be a bit more specific here, in the hopes of making some sense out of the last few months and how it is affecting our future path.

The year started off with a promising series of events at Bloc Projects, where we kicked off with our third co-partnership with The Artist’s Journey conference and the annual Members Show. I had just joined Bloc in January and was still finding my feet when COVID-19 ground all of Europe to a halt. For the first few weeks, our Director David McLeavy and I remained cautiously optimistic. We proposed what we felt was a thoughtfully reworked programme relevant for the precarity of now and applied for emergency funding from the Arts Council England. Again, like for many of us, it didn’t work out. We have had to go back to the drawing board, but in doing so, we have also tried to slow down our pace. While there has been a lot of Zoom meetings and bid writing, we haven’t been under the same kind of production pressure as usual. This means we have had the “luxury” to reconsider what Bloc Projects stands for and what it could become over the next few years. Right now, we are asking how we can do better as an arts organisation and what sort of place we (want to) occupy in the current cultural landscape. More broadly, we are also questioning why we are doing what we do.

Meanwhile, lives continue to be lived in a time of heightened vigilance, heightened policing and heightened state oppression. And we are seeing signs of this globally, from the forced implementation of the national security law in my native Hong Kong to the brutal killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis. We are repeatedly witnessing the insidiousness of imperial entitlement – China within Hong Kong as a supposed “autonomous region” – and anti-blackness. This includes a particularly personal reminder of East Asianness and its complicated proximity to whiteness; one of the officers charged for Floyd’s death is Hmong-American. I am part of the problem.

And the arts and cultural sector — we include ourselves here — are part of the problem too. We have not taken a stronger position against such structural injustices, because we either benefit (in)directly from them or feel, as individuals, the need to represent the tepidly progressive rhetoric of the organisations we work for. Beyond the performative, anti-racist solidarity on social media, Bloc Projects wants to dedicate ourselves to the hard graft of institutional reconfiguration. We do not want to keep reiterating the “strangeness” of these viral times but take stock of the damage, review what is actually “pandemic”, and make informed steps towards decolonising ourselves.

But the reflections of the last three months have also seen some hopeful glimmers of possibility. These have emerged from long, frank discussions between Dave and me along with our very supportive board, resulting in the following key concerns: we have to be more socially responsive and we deeply believe that an arts organisation has a role in the giving and receiving of care. What is clear is that the world cannot go back to the way it was. In the pressure chamber of self-isolation, an explosive mixture of social longing, intimacy, and indignation has been brewing. Certainly, what we normally do as Bloc Projects — plan and produce exhibitions and events — also means that we are in a hamster wheel of delivery to prove our claim of who we are, i.e. a contemporary arts organisation. There’s never the time to look up. Yet here we are, and we’ve got the time.

“Who we are” in reality is a pair of part-time freelancers with our own sincere and complex motivations for doing what we do. Therefore, as Bloc Projects, Dave and I pledge to strive for more. Through an ethos of “critical care”, we will work alongside artists to lay bare our

infrastructural mechanisms and own up to their inadequacies where they need improving. We will have conversations with more people from different marginalised backgrounds in order to grow the *Salon* programme legacy. We will continue to nurture its peer-led approaches in increasingly urgent circumstances. We will undo the division between artistic and educational curation by questioning what actually resonates with publics – which, indeed, is plural and diverse. We will keep listening and keep checking our complicities, recentring our focus where we failed to before.

Above all, we hope you can have patience with us as we fumble, sometimes awkwardly, ahead.

For now, stay close by staying safe,

Sunshine Wong

Public Programme Coordinator