

# The Culture Collective Story



Evaluation  
Creative  
Response

by John  
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The Culture Collective is a network of 26 participatory arts projects, shaped by local communities and funded by the Scottish Government through Creative Scotland between March 2021 and October 2023.

Queen Margaret University were commissioned to evaluate the programme and its impact.

This book is a creative response to the findings of their report by one of the artists involved in delivering the project John Martin Fulton.

It is dedicated to all the artists involved, whether or not they consider themselves to be artists.



## Prologue

Imagine a Scotland where culture is valued and is protected and is nurtured.

Where culture is woven through everyday life. Where it shapes and is shaped  
by society.

Imagine if the transformative power of culture in Scotland was experienced  
by everyone.

Imagine...



## One

In the time of Covid, when all of Scotland was locked down and the people were lonelier than ever before, it was decided that culture could be used to help.

The power of art, it was said, could bring hope to isolated people. Culture could coax communities to come back together to rebuild what they had lost.

To aid with this the artists of Scotland were called upon. They had long known that creativity could spark joy and bring wellbeing. They were already prepared to join the effort.

And so the Culture Collective was born.

In 26 places across Scotland, in different forms, through different lives, but all joined together in one purpose and one network.



## Two

It was in this uncertain period that the Culture Collective began its journey.

Its purpose was to reach deep into the hearts of communities across the land. It was to find people whose lives had been most impacted by Covid, some of the most vulnerable, some of the hardest to reach.

The land was still locked down and the Collective was going to be at the forefront of opening up, instrumental in restoring activity in communities.

People were still scared to come out of their houses. The Collective would have to be brave and light a way.







## Three

And as it happened the Collective had no map and no clear instructions other than to restore.

It had no list of what it had to achieve and no specific outcomes it had to produce.

However, it turned out that this lack of directions made the Collective free...

It was free to shape its work to what mattered in communities and what mattered to the artists of its ranks. It was free to make things happen that made sense in the places they found themselves.

It was free to make mistakes and to learn and to change.

Sometimes having no directions means we have to become strong.



## Four

And because they could The Collective went to work with people normally hidden far away from the world of art.

They found people who feared the word Art, or who thought art was something that came from other people but not from them.

Asylum seeker mums with children on their knees

Deaf teenagers who hadn't met their deaf friends all through lockdown

People fighting drug addictions who need to be around other sober people to keep them going in their struggle

People too cold or hungry to have anything left to think about themselves or to think about art

Older people who thought they would spend their last days alone

Young people, children who had forgotten how to play with others

All of these people and many more were connected to the Collective and to each other and in this way its light was spread.



## Five

Making art gave these people reasons to sit shoulder to shoulder again and offered them bravery to try new things.

Eventually, it would give communities the power to tell their own tales in Art.

But first the Collective would shape itself into what the community wanted to spark confidence in people by showing them that art was something they could do themselves.

In the end it would give them confidence to realise that their own voices were already beautiful.

So they could tell their own stories of change.





## Six

To do this the Collective moved in new ways to bring art to places where it wasn't normally seen.

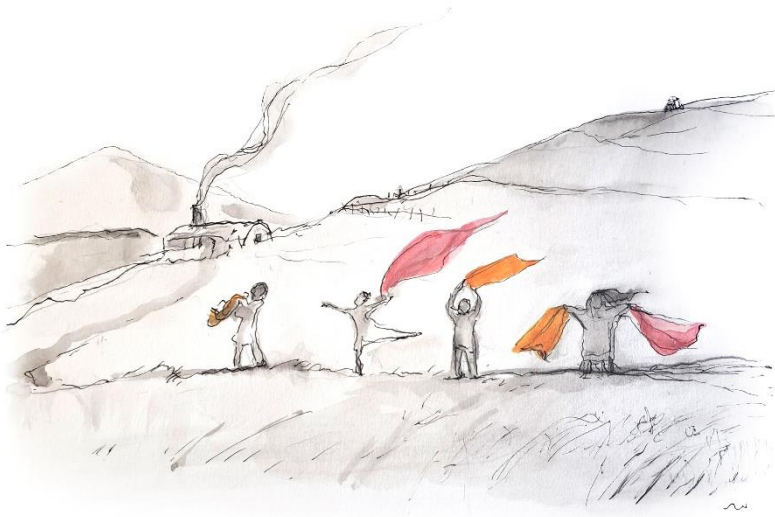
A theatre materialized in the grounds of a care home.

A portrait exhibition appeared on the walls of a chip shop.

Meanwhile, the lands of Scotland normally give art difficulty because the people are so spread out, often living on islands or in rural places.

The Culture Collective found new ways to overcome this.

Artists living in these lands were taken on, or they travelled often, or they brought people from secluded places to them.







## Seven

And chief among the reasons it worked was because artists were allowed to stay longer and build trust.

Often in the past they would have to move on swiftly to find new work.

But with the Collective they could stay longer, two years in fact, so people could get to know them and they could get to know the people.

And in doing so the people saw that artists are not strange or exotic or special. They are normal people with normal hearts.

So the people began to realise that if artists are normal maybe they were artists too.

In this way, many, many new artists were made.





## **Eight**

For the first time many of the artists felt valued and appreciated as they had never been before.

In the past they had struggled for work but now they were paid fairly and given training and support to make them feel confident and helpful and part of a community.

Before, most of the artists had worked alone.

But now they could meet and share and learn from other artists across the country. They could encourage one another and offer support and advice and sympathy when it was needed.

For artists, it was the happiest of times many of them could remember.

(There were occasions, even, when they gathered together from all across Scotland to share their work and talk about the people and places they had come from.)



## Nine

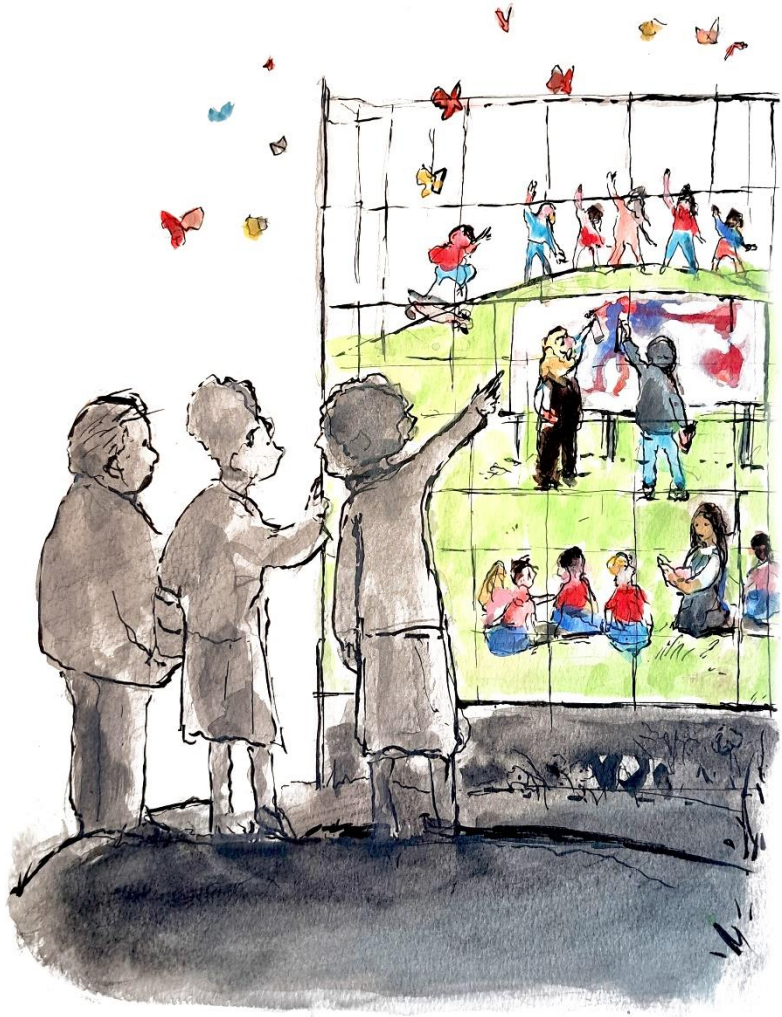
And others could see how they were working, and that people were not afraid of art. That art was already normal for people.

They began to realise there might be different ways to use art and culture to achieve things. Maybe it could be used to help a village decide on its future. Maybe it could be used for other ends.

There was such a demand for this type of work in communities of all kinds.

Art could be welcomed back again and again into communities if people were no longer afraid of it.





## Ten

And when the Collective came to look at what it had done it realised its journey had only just begun.

Its work is still developing...

Of the many things it has achieved the richest and most fruitful might yet prove to be the important cultural infrastructure it has created.

The networks between artists, organisations and partners that it sparked still exist.

If life has taught the Collective anything it is that these foundations should be built upon, not left to crumble.

For that would be a waste....





## Epilogue

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