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InSEA ART Education VISUAL Journal IMAG intends to provide a visual platform, which, in line with the constitution of InSEA, will help foster international cooperation and understanding, and promote creative activity in art through sharing experiences, improving practices, and strengthening the position of art in all educational settings. IMAG is an international, online, Open Access and peer-reviewed e-publication for the identification, publication and dissemination of art education theories and practices through visual methods and media.

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International Artist ‘Interactions’

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Abstract
In this visual article we will share experiences of an artist-in-residency project at the University of Tsukuba in Japan. The article starts by explaining the reasoning and motivations of an international artists collaboration. It explores and visually documents the context of developing a learning community of artistic practice. It visually describes a range of interactions, and peer reviewing opportunities which aimed to develop new understandings, knowledge and skills. It also highlights the use of an international artist teacher to facilitate and support the community in its exploration. A buddy system, studio-based crits, museum and gallery visits, curating, exhibiting and speaking publicly are all shown as processes for enabling the artists’ dialogue and development in an international context for making.

Keywords
Artist-in-residency; international; collaboration; dialogue; studio-based practice; visual art; artist teacher; community of practice; learning community; meaning making; buddy system; studio-based crits; museum and galleries; critical & contextual; curation; exhibiting; peer review; artistic practice as research; interaction; communication; cultural exchange; Japan; higher education; undergraduate and postgraduate art students.

Biography
Andy Ash is an Artist, Researcher and Educator who teaches MA & PGCE Art Education at the University College London and has a studio at Red Herring, Brighton.
Dr Kanae Minowa is an art educator who teaches undergraduates in the Faculty of Art and Design at the University of Tsukuba.
‘Interaction’ was a 10-day international artist-in-residency (AiR) project based in Tsukuba Japan. This was the second year of the Campus Artist in Residence (CAIR) programme designed to facilitate a more global exposure of art education and art practice for the University of Tsukuba Art & Design students and staff. Project Director, Dr Minowa, using the Tsukuba students’ evaluations from the first CAiR identified the need for closer international collaborations and it was felt that on this occasion they wanted to create a learning environment to stimulate dialogue and genuine interactions. The open call attracted global attention and the CAIR student selection committee identified student artists of interest from Mexico, Poland, Egypt, China and UK. Their hope was that the international interactions could be enriching and stimulating to the participants and their learning community. This programme brought together 10 visual artists (5 Japanese, 5 international), along with other Tsukuba students (in particular 4 curators, 2 photographers and 2 graphic designer) for an intense residency and making experience.
So, why would you want to run an artist-in-residency programme? CAIR is an opportunity to invite artists to spend time and space away from their usual environments and work obligations. The intention was to provide time for reflection, research, making, discussion and presentation. It would allow an individual opportunity to explore his/her practice within another community (Wenger, 1998); a chance to meet new people, perhaps use new materials/techniques and to experience life in a new location. International artist-in-residencies are important (Sharp and Dust, 1990) because they provide opportunities for artists from around the world to spend time in a new atmosphere and environment (Lehman, 2017; Corbett, 2015). They facilitate cultural and artistic exchange, nurture experimentation and new ideas, and encourage research and the development of new work.
UK Artist Teacher Andy Ash was invited by Dr Minowa to consult the mixed group of undergraduate and postgraduate artists. Andy Ash draws upon Art-based inquiry concepts (Diamond & Mullen, 1999; Eisner, 2002; Sullivan, 2005) to theorize his position and he used his expertise to advise on the planning whilst also leading the studio and gallery-based sessions. He modelled an open approach by placing his own practice at the centre of the communities learning, offering his practice up for critique and discussion (Ash, 2019). During the residency Andy Ash exhibited his current work ‘The Art of Walking’ at the T+ Gallery in Tsukuba. The exhibition asked the audience ‘What does it mean to be out walking in the world?’ This exhibition was a collection of recent works which investigated the relationship between the brain, the body, the soul and art making: a kind of dialogue while walking. Through a series of prints, sculptures and objects a space was created to ask questions, questions about time, space and consciousness of the artist’s world as much as about putting one foot in front of the other. Andy Ash invites the audience to walk in his shoes considering themes of footprints, lines, writing, intimate reflections, the inner and outer landscape, the sole/soul, and the interplay between body, mind and the world all whilst walking on the South Downs in the England.

Andy Ash had previously worked on a number of UK based residencies (Ash, 2019) and is skilled in using his own contemporary art practice and research as a stimulus for students’ learning and debate (Irwin and de Cosson, 2004). Many themes were considered during the debates, including eastern and western philosophies; different international art scenes; embodiment; knowledge production; journeys; mapping; curation; installation; contemporary and modern art practices; and meaning making.
CAIR 2020 received financial support from the University of Tsukuba and was designed to promote the universities ‘Educational Strategy 2019’ (University of Tsukuba, 2019). The University of Tsukuba, like other Japanese universities, has been aiming to develop a more global profile not just in its student intake but also in its curriculum content.

Japan has a long history of Art education (Masuda, 2003) which in the recent past is influenced by traditional Japanese and Western notions of art, emphasising the development of technical skills and representation. Drawing is seen as core to making in all the different specialisms. Traditional Japanese painting is an option to pursue for the art students but interest in this appears to be declining. Observations from Dr Minowa’s research (Minowa, 2018), her practice in the Maldives and university teaching led her to want to challenge her students understanding of art making and to explore more multicultural and global perspectives of art education. By inviting artists from a range of countries, languages, religions and continents it was hoped to inspire her students to engage with a culturally diverse environment.
The CAIR 2020 student working party started in the summer of 2019 and was led by Dr. Minowa. Initially ideas were vague and somewhat confusing but Dr Minowa helped them move forward with regular focused discussion. The working party took its time to decide on the framework of the programme, including the theme, purpose, aim and objectives, while building upon their reflections and participants evaluations on the previous year’s CAIR. From the beginning the desire to engage with more contemporary art practice and processes was evident. At this point the designers planned the main visuals/logo which helped to make their direction visual and tangible.

The team agreed on ‘Interaction’ as the theme of CAIR 2020 and aimed to create an active ‘community’ of artists (Wenger, 2007), with communication and collaboration at the centre. To achieve this, it was agreed that at the residency’s core would be making, talking, regularly reflecting, sharing and discussing in an open and supportive creative environment (John-Steiner, 2006). To ensure all could contribute Andy Ash proposed a buddy system so that participants could be brought together and supported.
The buddy system was to enable a welcoming and productive studio environment for the participants. A buddy system is defined as ‘a cooperative arrangement whereby individuals are paired or teamed up and assume responsibility for another’s welfare or safety’ (Lexico, 2020). Each international artist was paired with a local artist who was then allocated their own local curator to collaborate with. The buddies where introduced a month or so before arrival and online communications were started to initiate an early dialogue. It was hoped that this would allay any anxiety about entering into a different culture and act as a point of contact to facilitate an introduction to the AiR, the university campus and the ‘interactions’ theme. It was anticipated that the buddy approach (Benzel, 2005) would enable opportunities for dialogue as they would feel more at ease talking and asking questions peer to peer.
The purpose-built studio made it easy to establish a daily routine for making and dialogue. Each artist worked on their individual practice in a space next to their buddy, this enabled them to share skills and ideas in an informal and relaxed manner. Andy Ash and Kanae Minowa were on hand in the studio each day to support and facilitate the making and reflecting. Each artist kept a diary and at the end of each working day they would collaborate with their buddy to make a video diary recording the day's discussions and thoughts. These reflections would then feed into the daily whole group and crit discussions.
Formal opportunities to engage in a whole group dialogue was orchestrated by Andy Ash. These included the crit (Goldstein, 2020), gallery and museum visits, exhibition presentations and social activities. Andy Ash saw himself as a facilitator, someone who engages the audience in line with a ‘constructive’ learning model (Watkins, 2003), generating spaces for the participants to be active makers of meaning rather than passive recipients of knowledge. The crit enabled each pair of artists to present their work to the group (Thornton, 2009). Each artist explained their ideas, the background for his/her investigations and choice of technique/materials, whilst the rest of the artists, tutors and curators gave feedback. For most this was a new experience, the use of a crit was not always common practice in art education back in their home countries. Andy Ash was able to create an atmosphere of respect, understanding and constructive thinking and the artists were able to express their ideas freely – without judging.
To complement the discussions on meaning-making and to extend the understanding around context a series of opportunities was made to investigate Japanese culture, to exchange experiences and insights while visiting museums and galleries in Tokyo and Tsukuba; incorporating contemporary and historical collections. The critical and contextual element of any art education should be a ‘reflexive process in which making and understanding (production and reception, encoding and decoding) are held in a symbiotic relationship where both are responsible for the construction of meaning’ (Addison & Burgess, 2000). These opportunities were moments for the artists to look outside of their own points of reference, to explore other social and cultural practices in a historical and contemporary context. These trips usually also involved a healthy element of socialising, eating/drinking, shopping, music and fun!
Developing confidence in speaking about art, articulating ideas and developing art language to communicate to each other was also important in the preparation for the final exhibition. The artists were encouraged to engage with the general public who visited the studio as well as each other while making decisions about how to describe their work, how to write about their work and how best to express themselves. Many themes are evident in the artists’ practice and meaning making; including their friendships and relationships; personal and psychological factors; understandings about identity; challenging issues in society; gender and politics; environmental concerns; language and culture; all relating to young people’s reflections on aspects of contemporary society that are personally and socially meaningful.
An important outcome of the studio conversations, the sharing of ideas and engaging as a community of artists was the need to bring the work together in a gallery space to show an audience what had been achieved. For all of them it was the first time they had had a chance to get public feedback and look at their work objectively. Andy Ash used an ‘artist-led pedagogy’ (Pringle, 2009), an opportunity for the artist and curators to be challenged to make collaborative decisions about how they would curate the work; how to use the space/venue; how to write an artist’s statement in English and how to address the public in the Private View presentations. An emphasis was placed on producing a professional and thoughtful collection of work whilst being able to express their new understandings and knowledge to an audience. In a way the private view presentation was a celebration of the new accumulated experiences as much as a show of the art work made.
A more detailed article will follow soon using the research data gathered from the daily video reflections, the dairies, the art works made and the evaluations completed by the artists and curators. Emphasis will be placed on the experience of the studio making, exhibiting, the dialogic with observation, reflection and discussion. It is hoped that this ‘grounded’ approach (Charmaz, 2003) will help develop an understanding of the holistic overview, whilst the reflection points towards a need for more detailed, ‘fine grained analysis’ informed by context. But at this point it is already evident that this kind of short intense AiR experience, where international artists and curators are brought together to collaborate with experienced artists, can generate significant learning opportunities for personal and group development. This kind of supportive cultural and artistic exchange can nurture experimentation and new ideas and support research and the development of new work. Being a part of a supportive community (Wenger, 1998) individuals can explore their practice and engage in important life experiences in a new location. But on top of this, it was fun! Everyone who took part described how their own making had been re-energised, their own passion taken to a new level and they felt they were now more connected to a world-wide art community.
References


