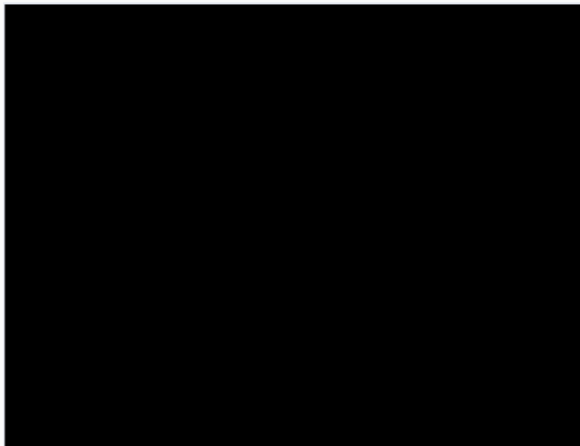


Spine

Front cover



**Art Confined and Feral Futures:
Social Practice in a Time of Social Distance**

Inside front cover

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"In this unprecedented time of a global pandemic, we all face challenges of social isolation and mental wellbeing through 'lockdown' restrictions. Whilst difficult to navigate, plan and implement, social art practitioners can and will hold a vital place in our communities. Lady Kitt is creating projects which actively encourage, promote and include opportunities for individuals to come together in safe ways to create art and change. Kitt's practice has reacted and responded to the situation, whilst still retaining their core voice and ideas. 'Art Confined and Feral Futures' is a prime example of how the artist has stimulated conversation, collaboration and a sense of togetherness through acts of making. This project encourages us to think about how and what we can do to create a simple positive impact upon each other's day-to-day lives. The act of making 3D paper objects, safe collection and assembly of a 'final' artwork, creates a feeling of inclusion, connectivity and community."

Mark Devereux, Director MDP, 2020

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"I really like your use of the phrase 'creative intimacies' – I think that you have made it clear that this is possible in socially distanced circumstances. In situations, both within COVID's threat and beyond or outside of it... the methods by which we make art together and/or create social actions can be the same. I think the project can be seen to show this."

Art Confined Co-author*, 2020

* Throughout the text some quotes are not attributed to specific individuals but to 'Art Confined Co-author, 2020', this is because these quotes were taken from anonymised feedback gathered at the end of the project.

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Acknowledgements

'Art Confined' is a live-art, craft project conceived and facilitated by Lady Kitt, created alongside co-authors Sofia Barton, Sarah Li, Adam Carruthers, Kev Howard, Finn Ratford, Edwin Li and members of the DGA.*

This publication, and the installation it documents, have been commissioned by Disconsortia** as part of the "A Place at the Table" commissions, funded by Arts Council England.

* North East based Drag collective.

** Disconsortia is a North East based Disabled artist-led consortium.

Image credit - Sarah Li

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Introduction

"Art Confined and Feral Futures": Wild art and change conceived in quiet confinement.

I'm a person-who-makes-art-with-people. This approach to being creative gets called all sorts of snazzy stuff: social practice, participatory art, community craftivism. I'm not really dead concerned about which term we use, but am super keen to communicate that connecting with people through and for creativity, is essential to the work I do.

The togetherness that happens through collaborative creativity doesn't just produce art; it makes space. Space for growing. Growing thoughts and understandings, communities, actions, strength and change.

The COVID19 lockdown brought with it an immediate halt to most of my projects. The initial impact of this was: no collaborating, no creative focus, no income. All pretty challenging personally, professionally, creatively. The central creative challenge was:

"How the hell do we "do" social practice in a socially distanced world?"

Image credit - Sarah Li

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And this is the question I've posed to myself and a small group of co-authors. On my adventures I've been guided, supported and excited by these astonishing people as we've worked alongside one another collaboratively via post and digital technologies. These are people with whom I already have creative connections (some developing for over a decade, others a few months old). People who, during lockdown, were (like me) thinking about art, wishing for change in the world and missing people.

Together over the last 5 months we've scrummaged around in and played about with my question:

"How the hell do we "do" social practice in a socially distanced world?"

Through text and images, this publication documents some of the stuff that's happened so far. It also suggests and imagines things we could all do to build and nourish creative connections (or "creative intimacies", as I've come to call them), even when we find ourselves physically apart. For me, it's vital to carry on finding and sharing tools and actions that tenderly incite and fiercely care for these precious and delicately unfolding points of contact.

Credits:

Co-authors: Sofia Barton, Finn Ratford, Edwin and Sarah Li, Kev Howard, Adam Carruthers, and Members of the Alternative Drag collective "DGA".

I have been very fortunate to receive funding for this project in the form of grants and commissions from:

Arts Council England, Disconsortia and Summer in the City Festival (Durham University).

My investigations have also been supported and enlivened by conversations with:

Two Destination Language (and my fellow FIELD Ecologists), Daniel Russell, Constellations artists and facilitators (with UP Projects and Flat Time House), Bridie Jackson, Lisette Auton and Mark Devereux.

This book has been compiled, designed and edited by my creative producer Sarah Li.

The images of the installation are in The Star and Shadow Cinema space, the actual cinema space itself is an artwork made by artist AK Knol.

And finally, last but not least, in this seemingly endless list of gratitudes, thank you Vici Wreford-Sinnott, Alix Collingwood-Swinburn, Axisweb, the folks at Star and Shadow Cinema and fellow Social Art Network members for providing a variety of support and encouragement to make this project happen.

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Image credits - Lady Kitt

April 2020: The Project Begins

This little bit of writing (inspired by an exchange between Social Practice Surgery¹ co-facilitator Dan Russell and I) is basically how the ideas for Art Confined started:

"In lockdown so far I've mostly been doing two things: Thinking about art and missing people.

I've been thinking about... how I miss creative connections. About what a long-term lack of these might do to us, individually and as a society. In this new temporary way of things, collectively, we seem pretty good at doing the high impact, relatively low engagement stuff - NHS clapping, yarn bombing, street sings. And that's great and galvanising and important. But, for me, what art does best (the beauty, the nuance, the support), that all comes from collaborative, creative connections: working small and close, probably for extended periods of time. Conceptually in terms of sharing ideas, emotionally forming new understandings and physically from making with other people - those shared sensory experiences of building objects, events and worlds together. Dealing with materials manipulated by many hands, ideas slowly mulled over by many heads."

Lady Kitt, April 2020

¹Social Practice Surgery is a series of continually developing, live(ly) resources created for and by social art practitioners to support each other in a variety of circumstances, and in particular when we are suffering from "Mess Fatigue". For more info see: <https://www.ladykitt.com/blank>.



"I feel like making work like this during lockdown has shown that it is not only possible to create social, creative intimacies during lockdown, but can actually be at the centre of how the communication is happening."

**Art Confined
Co-author, 2020**

Image credit - Lady Kitt



Image credits - Lady Kitt

"I just love the origami headdresses...
I enjoyed and felt really honoured to have been a recipient of
what I see as a beautiful gift!"

Art Confined Co-author, 2020

"[through involvement in the project] I have realised that a
different approach/adaptability is needed for some parts of the
community that cannot access technology... For example, easy
to use platforms, universal language (no jargon), subtitles for
videos, and family friendly activities. It really made me think
about how to move forward [in my own practice] and inspired
a different way of working."

Art Confined Co-author, 2020

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Image credit - Lady Kitt



Image credit - Sarah Li

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Co-Authors

I love humans. No denying we can be a foul old bunch on occasion,
but generally I'm a massive fan. I find us endlessly surprising,
comfortingly familiar and all encompassingly fascinating.

I had to find a way to work alongside other people during lockdown,
for my personal and professional wellbeing, however complicated
that was, however alien the methods. It was essential. If I didn't, my
mind would surely disintegrate into a vast gloopy mess. I'd be lost and
lonely. My focus would drift off into a vague half fuzz of grainy
platitudes. The skills I've spent years building and honing would sit
gathering metaphorical dust and chip fat.

But which people? I've felt very emotionally (and physically) tender
and vulnerable in lockdown. I didn't feel confident to go out and find
brand new folk to work with. Though meeting new people is often one
of the great joys about the work I do, it can be complicated and
stressful. I didn't have the energy or fortitude for it. I realised that I
wanted to use creativity to build bonds with people who I want to know
better and to stay connected to those I already treasure. A few people
came immediately to mind.

The Invitation

"You wanna make art with me?" or something similar.

It was all very informal via Facebook messenger and
texts. A bit teenager-asking-for-a-snog-at-the-bus-stop.
Blunt in initial intention, full of unknowable potential
excitements/disappointments. We knew we were doing
a thing, but weren't quite sure what it was yet, definitely
didn't know how it would end up.... Still don't I suppose.

I'm extremely grateful that everyone I asked said "yes".

"...it was exciting to see how you would make that [paper
object] and how you interpreted it as a wearable art object for
me. It was also really fun taking the pictures and having this
creative exchange with you."

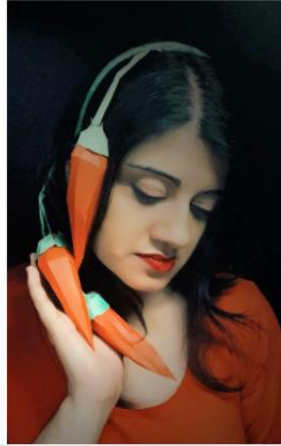
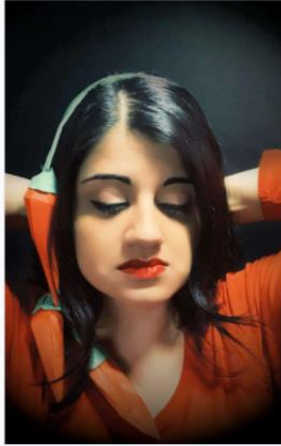
Art Confined Co-author, 2020

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Sofia Barton

Image credits - Sofia Barton

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Sarah and Edwin Li



Image credit - Edwin Li



Image credit - Sarah Li



Image credit - Edwin and Sarah Li

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"Concepts of social engaging while physically distanced are - and will continue to be - discussed by creative communities across the globe as we navigate the new normal. The emerging responses may not be the same as face to face co-creation, but one of art's most redeeming features is its ability to engage, it has the potential to become an increasingly powerful voice in a socially distanced world. A key strand of the 'SitC Festival' programme included commissioning a series of short artist films as artworks responding to notions of home and quarantine. While some artists chose to capture the visuality of their daily routines or localities, Lady Kitt's film about 'Art Confined and Feral Futures' takes a personally reflective approach discussing their deliberations on how to continue a collaborative practice on your own. In the film, Kitt introduces the concept of Art Confined, their quarantine art project, and together with artist and activist Sofia Barton discusses the art they have made together - collaboratively - while physically distanced. Initially presenting a challenge to more regular methods of socially collaborative making, the physical distance between Kitt and Sofia becomes the very inspiration and catalyst for their creativity. It has enabled new explorations of slowness (for example, the use of 'snail mail' post) and contemplation, focusing on the hand-made as a method of communication and demonstrating care."

Alix Collingwood-Swinburn, Curator, Contemporary Art, Durham University, 2020

*SitC is Durham's annual arts festival and a collaboration between Durham University and Durham County Council: www.sitcfestival.org.

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Finn Ratford



Image credits - Finn Ratford

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Lady Kitt



Image credit - Lady Kitt

Adam Carruthers



Image credit - Adam Carruthers

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Kev Howard



Image credits - Kev Howard

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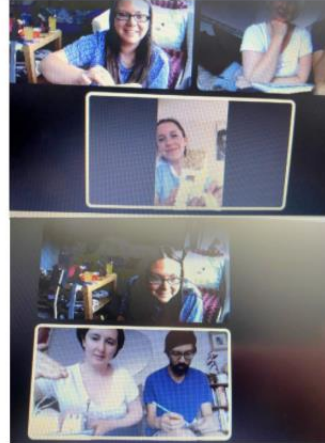
DGA Collective



Image credit - Lady Kitt



Image credit - Samantha Goodrick



"...crafting as a tradition within itself has roots in activism and community and so it felt very appropriate to be working within those traditions..."

**Art Confined
Co-author, 2020**

"... art speak and spaces where we talk about art can be intimidating so to just have an exchange based on making was refreshing."

**Art Confined
Co-author, 2020**

Image credits -
Lady Kitt

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The Processes

Everything we created and documented was done in isolation, at our individual homes (or during our daily exercise) during lockdown. After social distancing restrictions eased, Sarah Li and I installed an exhibition at Star and Shadow Cinema (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK). The installation was created in accordance with social distancing measures at the time and was never open to the public.

Other than this, the chronology is a bit all over the place and the following isn't exactly what happened for each co-author, but basically the process was this:

- I invited co-authors to tell me their favourite fruit/veg or plant.
- I made each person a wearable 3D paper sculpture of the thing they'd chosen and sent it to them via post.
- They did something with the sculpture (installation/performance) and documented it through photography.
- They sent the photographs to me via email and sent the sculpture back to me by post.

• I combined the objects together and, with the help of Sarah Li, made a giant paper shrine. A shrine to "us-ness" - Our collective ability to elicit, exchange, respond, and create, even (perhaps especially) when we find ourselves physically apart.

• I asked everyone to give me some feedback based on a few questions/prompts.

The installation was created (and destroyed) in a day. The only document of it is here, in this book, online at:
www.disconsortia.co.uk
and www.ladykitt.com.



Image credit - Lady Kitt

Installation ready to be transported to the Star and Shadow venue.

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"The project definitely showed me communities and creative connections are possible during lockdown no matter how isolated and alien it may feel."

Art Confined Co-author, 2020

"...within our direct group it [the project] will have a huge [social] impact and it might also influence other organisations through being present in the cultural landscape and our members' involvement in other organisations."

Art Confined Co-author, 2020

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The Stuff that Happened

What I hoped might happen:

- We might start to answer some questions about "How the hell we do social practice in a socially distanced world?"
- We would become connected to new people/become more connected with some of the people we already know and treasure.
- We would make some physical objects.
- We would make some social connections (creating mutual support) and identify possible shared interests in future social change.



Image credits - Sarah Li

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ART* stuff that's happened:

- The individual objects I made for each co-author.
- The performances/installations and associated images the co-authors made with the objects.
- The objects made by everyone during the DGA group online workshop.
- The installation that no one saw.
- This book and the web content which document the other 4 things.

SOCIAL** stuff that's happened:

- New collaborations/connections, through the project new people have been introduced to one another, creating friendships, new creative relationship and projects. There are at least two new projects (not necessarily ART projects) happening as a result of people meeting/getting to know each other better during Art Confined.
- Collective sense of agency and urgency. From the feedback there was a real feeling that involvement in the project had "lit a fire" in us. Getting together with other people discussing the effects of the pandemic seemed to make us especially aware of and keen to create change around our responsibilities to care for one another and the environment (from local to global) and particularly being actively anti-racist.
- We discovered new things about each other. I'm using a very personal example for this: one of the co-authors is my daughter Finn. We live in the same house and, in a way, know one another very well. At first glance we are not "distant" at all. But there's a kind of knowing that I've felt us meandering away from over recent years. I think an important part of

growing up involves some disentangling from the people you grew up with, but it turns out we both missed some of the tangle. Finn has asked that I don't share details of the conversations we had during the project. But, am permitted to tell you how I feel about the fact that they happened and that is: honoured and delighted. I will forever feel honoured and delighted to look back at the sharing Finn and I got to do during this project, a rare and wonderful thing indeed.

- The project has functioned as a way of identifying individual social interest and combining some of these. One example of this is Sarah Li's interest in the idea of Queer, utopian world-making through art and policy development (creating organisational structures that reflect how they wish the whole world could be) and my interest in using collaborative craft as a connecting activity through which groups can collectively develop embodied policy change (change that we each feel and contribute to in direct, regular ways). I approached the DGA (a North East based Drag collective of which Sarah and I are both members) and proposed an online crafting/policy development workshop facilitated by me. The workshop happened towards the end of this first stage of the project, so it's hard to reflect yet, on how this may support the group to develop policy.

*ART: In general, I'm not really massively interested in defining ART and this definition doesn't cover all the stuff I think it is and can be, but for simplicity here I'm talking about physical objects, photographs and performances.

**SOCIAL: Relating to communities and groups - how and why we organise ourselves and what for.

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"...the session allowed me be more comfortable talking in a video conferencing-style format which can feel strangely formal. Because we were all doing a similar activity that we could connect together on... Feeling comfortable in a situation where people decide things for a group is so important - having a voice and having the confidence to speak up is so necessary in any kind of politics... this project helped illustrate this in my mind."

Art Confined Co-author, 2020

"I liked that we were making our own ideas of houses whilst talking about safety policy, there was something quite beautiful about thinking of ideals and how what we dream our community will look like while creating mini spaces of our own. It was also a beautiful representation of how everyone perceives space differently, we all had different houses, yet we were all excited about what other people had thought to do with their creations."

Art Confined Co-author, 2020

"...it [the project] really proved that we could forge connections with each other during lockdown...it felt very possible to have quite powerful connections with each other, I guess despite lockdown."

Art Confined Co-author, 2020

Image credit - Sarah Li



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Image credit - Lady Kiitt



Image credit - Sarah Li



Image credits - Sarah Li

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Tools/Resources/An Invitation

Some ideas about how the stuff happened. Which bits of it we might be interested in doing again/more. Things other people might be interested in trying (or avoiding):

I'm really into stuff being useful. I'm happy, so happy, that I get to document this project. But I also really don't just want this to be a document, I want it to be a little encouragement, an invitation, maybe even a gentle prod, I want to sift through what's happened and talk about a few bits that I think might be helpful in the future. Stuff that went great, stuff that totally fell on its arse and stuff that was definitely important, but maybe we're not quite yet sure why.

This info includes my own observations and thoughts from co-authors which have been gathered through feedback - formal and informal, instant and more considered. There have been opportunities for folks to feedback directly to me and anonymously through written feedback, so hopefully it's a helpful mix of reflections and opportunities to understand the project from voices other than mine.

- Before inviting other people to get involved I considered the "exchange rate(s)" we were working with/to. What is everyone giving to it (time, creativity, technical skill, emotional labour, physical resources), what would we all get out of it and how these exchanges would happen/be formalised?

The following seemed to work well: Being transparent and upfront about mutual support being one of the aims of the project. Encouraging and actively discussing what support means to each of us throughout the project. By building opportunities for support into the project - for example, after workshops I was available for half an hour to chat to anyone who wanted to debrief. Co-authors where financially reimbursed for their time and for any materials they used/bought during the project.) Crediting everyone involved. All this seemed to work well and co-authors felt they had been involved in a mutually beneficial exchange.

- Because of the pandemic the project was completely, necessarily built on ideas about safety and care. Being in an extreme circumstance of global, mutual care made us all focus on this. My big question now is "how to keep focusing on care, in less extreme, less universal circumstances?"

- Because we couldn't physically travel, the carbon footprint of our project was very small, in future projects we aim to really consider when it's appropriate and useful to meet in person.

- Because we "met" via video conferencing the meetings were more accessible to some of us (people particularly mentioned increased accessibility due to limited time, caring responsibilities, travel costs, and mobility).

- Because we "met" via technology the meetings were less accessible to some of us. Some people had ethical reasons for not wanting to use specific platforms. Some people are less used to using the technology or

find it complex to access physically. Some of us had concerns about safety relating to extractive technologies and data sharing. There was one person, who I really wanted to invite to be part of the project, but they don't have access to any of the technology that would make this possible - so they were completely excluded. There were issues with access due to people's individual tech not working. I'm doing some research into how to deal with some of these. Regarding extractive technologies, intellectual property, ethics around human rights and financing, Blue Jeans seems to me a useful alternative to some better known video conferencing platforms.

- We didn't worry about stuff being "finished". I think largely because of the (global pandemic) circumstances, we didn't feel pressure for this to be finished or "right" - whatever either of those things even means. This has truly been a research project, open, experimental, meandering, surprising, a bit messy. I felt an odd freedom - this is a situation none of us have ever been in before so who knows what might happen? As long as we recorded and discussed it, gave ourselves time to reflect and share more widely - that's great. I feel like it's very important for me to preserve some of this feeling in the future. To allow things to be more fluid and porous. I'm not sure how I'll do that. I need more thinking and reflecting on how to encourage such openness (in myself and others), without the backdrop of a universal threat. I guess, once/if there isn't one anymore, I might start to have a better idea of this.

"I think a system within which participants (co-authors) receive financial 'recompense' for engaging in a fun activity that values their time and work is a great model! More of this please!"

Art Confined Co-author, 2020

- Lunch allows for accidents: The common meeting place of "lunchtime" with a vague purpose of refresh/refill - not a strict set of outcomes - allows people to chat informally about being creative, about the book they're reading, about sandwiches. A common comment was that this informal group chatter provides an opportunity for unexpected connections, understandings, and excitements. It didn't happen online - everything was very focused, everything "felt like an announcement". A question we have is how to create/encourage that online?

- A little bit of structure goes a long way. A little bit of flexibility goes a long way. Brief agendas/setting out expectations for each session with a comment about which bits of these are flexible worked well. Meetings not running over was very important, when people schedule 2 hours "out" of their day from a domestic setting, the expectation is after 2 hours they will be able to go directly back into the domestic setting and life. Being flexible with time scales within the project was appreciated by all! This was much easier because of the increased flexibility of everyone during lockdown, the general acceptance that things can be complicated and people might be facing huge complexity in their lives. A big question for us (again) is how to embed this flexibility and care into our work and lives post pandemic?

Mutually growing and sharing knowledge is really, really important to me. If you want to chat about any of this - add to it, tell me I'm wrong, point me to new research, share something exciting and amazing that's happened to you please contact me at lady_kitt@ladykitt.com.

"It [the project] makes me think more about community action in a creative way. I was already thinking about this but your act of engagement has made me more aware of what can be possible and makes me more positive about making things like this happen."

Art Confined Co-author, 2020

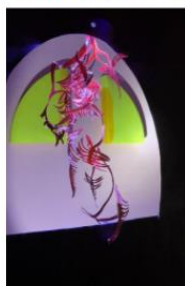


Image credits - Sarah Li

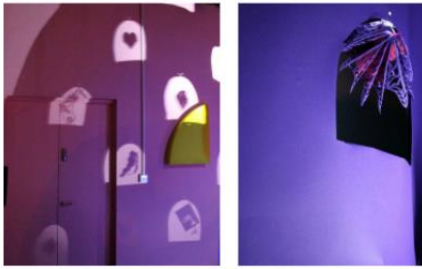


Image credits - Sarah Li

Conclusion

In mid-April 2020 I applied for Arts Council England emergency response funding.

This is an excerpt from my application:

"A well as, bringing an immediate halt to most of my income and professional development, the global pandemic has made me consider what I need long term, as a socially engaged artist, in an increasingly digital (possibly recurrently) socially distanced future.

My initial thoughts are: Skills - ability to manage digital platforms for online workshops."

It's interesting to look back at this now, realising that the skills I've needed to make socialness happen with distance have largely not been to do with "managing digital platforms".

Yes, internet access/phone line has been vital and some technical know-how is useful. There are huge problems with a lack of access to both of these, endemic and structural barriers exist. Barriers that I don't have the resources or knowledge to address here.

But for those of us fortunate enough to have access and very basic skills there are huge possibilities for making art (and social change) together, connecting through communication technologies.

Over the last 5 months some of the most profound, most emotionally, ideologically, creatively imitate experiences I have had, happened with poor internet connection, fuzzy visuals, glitchy audio.

During this project I've cried and smiled and blushed. I felt full of humility and confident beyond words. I've played and argued and fallen in love.

What did we do to conjure up these experiences and feelings? What helped us along the way?

I've found the skills most useful for creating points of contact are the same with distance as they are right up close:

Focus, humour, empathy, curiosity, vulnerability.

Pockets of time, built into activity. Pauses for thinking and processing. Listening to understand, not just to immediately respond.

These are the things that have supported us to make alongside one another, share ideas, create support. Allowing us, even in quiet confinement, to collectively dream of and create wild art and change.



Image credit left - Sarah Li

Image credits right - Lady Kitt



"...it felt like in lockdown, we didn't necessarily need to talk but the creative exchange itself was enough and that felt new and free."

Art Confined Co-author, 2020

This publication and the installation it documents have been commissioned by Disconsortia as part of the "A Place at the Table" commissions, funded by Arts Council England.

The wider "Art Confined" project has been supported by funding/commissions from:

Arts Council England, DISCONSORTIA and Summer in the City Festival (Durham University).

Disconsortia
A disabled artist led consortium of extraordinary voices



Supported using public funding by
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

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Image credit - Edwin Li



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Inside back cover

'Art Confined' is a live-art, craft project conceived and facilitated in UK lockdown 2020 by Lady Kitt, created alongside co-authors Sofia Barton, Sarah Li, Adam Carruthers, Key Howard, Finn Ratford, Edwin Li and members of the DGA.

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Back cover