

**SSW x Counterflows Caregivers Residency | Conversation transcript**

Jenny and Michael discuss the residency and explain what’s available to artists at SSW

JS I’m Jenny Salmean and I’m the Programme and Communications Manager at SSW. As a visual description I have short brown hair and I’m wearing a blue navy polo neck and grey trousers and I’m sitting with a laptop, and my phone, and a scarf and gloves and a mask on

MH I’m Michael Hautemulle and I’m the Technical Trainee at SSW. As a visual description I have brown hair, brown eyes, I’m in a massive blue boiler suit and wearing 3 layers underneath it.

JS It’s cold! And we’re in the workshop at the moment, we’re in the studio, so it’s a bit echoey. It’s a long room with white walls and wooden beams in the ceiling. There’s lots of desks kind of scattered with half used coffee cafetières and bits of junks cause we haven’t been super busy here over the last few months so it’s very much in flux.

But we’re actually meeting to have a little chat about the SSW x Counterflows residency and I guess we’re going to chat about what the residency is, but we also want to share a little bit of information about what it means to be a sound or performance maker working in a sculpture workshop. So I think we’ll talk a little about that and also what’s possible here within the constraints of the residency framework and hopefully that will inform your application, so you can have an idea of what’s possible and what’s here for you too.

This will be the 3rd year that we have worked with Counterflows to run a residency and the first year we worked with Sholto Dobie, then last year it was Letitia Pleiades who came on residency and both years they’ve both done very different things, haven’t they Michael?

MH I was not here for the first one, so I can’t speak to that, but Letitia’s work was really exciting to be part of. It was in some ways a similar way for me to engage, and we’ll talk about this in a minute how we engage with artists in general, but coming from a sound and performance background is a really exciting ‘in’ to some of the processes I work with on a day-to-day.

JS Yes, because when people hear sculpture workshop, they probably think of stone and metal and public art, and that’s definitely something that we have done and still do, but I think now we’re definitely thinking about sculpture in its most expanded form. Anything is sculpture, sculpture is life! So I guess it’s more a conversation about making now, and process, and how there’s parallels between the process of making something that’s immaterial, or embodied or performed to making something that exists as an object form.

MH Definitely, and I think that conversation happens throughout SSW, about sculpture as life and as everything, within the context of a making facility. What’s quite special is we have the capacity to make objects but then how to make objects sort of not for the sake of the object but within the process and the why and the how it exists in the world.

JS So maybe it would be helpful for you Michael to talk a little bit about the workshops we have and the processes we support?

MH Definitely. So I’ll start with the cold casting facilities. This is a workshop we use to cast plaster and different rubbers; latex, hot rubber and silicone rubber. All of which feeds in to the metal casting process, but doesn’t have to, which is why I usually start talking about cold casting and I will finish talking about the facilities in metal casting.

 Then we have the wood workshop which is well-equipped general woodworking facilities, so table saw, radial arm saw, band saw, hand tools. It’s nothing too specialised but definitely enough to do general wood working and make stuff.

 We have the metal workshop where we do various welding, metal bending, cutting, and then again coming back to the end of the bronze or metal casting process, finishing of pieces.

 In the foundry we work with two types of mould, generally speaking. So we have a resin bonded sand process which uses sand and resin to make a mould of an object. And we use ceramic shell as the other one, which is a lost wax casting. So yesterday I was speaking to an artist who wanted to cast a shark’s tooth, so the way - I’ll use this example - you would go from the shark’s tooth into a rubber mould and take that and reproduce it in wax, and then dip the wax in ceramic shell to create the mould, then burn the wax out to create a cavity into which molten metal can be poured.

JS That sounds super technical! A lot of the artists who come on residency have never done this before, right?

MH Yes, lots of the artists who we work with have never done this before. And myself as an artist before starting as the trainee, I’d never done any of these processes before. Again, because of the way we work with artists, or performers and makers, *or people,* is to start every process with a conversation about what they’d like to make or investigate and then step by step work shoulder-to-shoulder with them (although currently with distancing!) and go through all those processes that I just spoke about. So it’s giving you an extensive outline of a process that does take about a week, but it is in tandem and working together throughout the whole thing. And most people come without having worked like this before.

JS Or even an idea of what they want to do, right? That’s something that’s really important to the making process regardless of what you make, is this sense of exploration and being able to try stuff that actually is awful and that you hate! I think it’s really important that there’s time within a residency framework for you just to test stuff and get to know it. And like we said earlier it’s not necessarily about the end result but the process of learning something and doing that with other people is a very interesting way to come together, it’s very bonding.

MH It is really bonding. And as a technician it’s really exciting to be part of that process of someone else’s working method or exploration. To investigate alongside them. And what’s nice is not having any required outcome. I think that’s also really important and exciting about the residency process - it gives that space to make without pressure.

JS Another thing that’s really interesting, particularly in relation to this residency, is it’s a way to consider your practice within a different context. But in addition to that, with this specifically being a call for people who have care giving responsibilities in whatever form they may take. Often you, Letitia actually said this when we were talking about the residency, as a caregiver you are often the person who is facilitating other people, while here, you will be facilitated and that’s a very different relationship you might have to your practice. And you know, it takes the pressure off. And hopefully that would, what we’re hoping, is that will give some freedom and respite and thinking time and living time and breathing time away from all the pressures of everything else that’s going on in the world at the moment. And you know, it’s fun.

MH It is fun. And you know we all come to work super excited to facilitate people’s making and exploring and to try to provide that space, without taking personal credit for that! But you know it’s the goal to allow people to have the space and respite to explore their own practice.

JS It’s worth mentioning as well that aside from the work we do in the foundry and the cold casting room, we also have a ceramics studio, we have a forge and we’re super up for trying stuff. It’s not like there’s one set way to do anything- I mean there are technical things you need to get right and our technicians will help with that - but if you come and you’re like I want to do this crazy thing, usually we’ll be like yes let’s try it and that’s super amazing too.

 But I think if you’re writing an application and you’re unsure about possibilities or you want to talk a little bit more about your ideas then we’re more than happy to have a chat with you about that. And you can get in touch with me, I’m jenny@ssw.org.uk and I’ll put you in touch with the relevant people if I can’t answer your question. But we hope this helps and good luck with your application.