

INTERVIEW to **Alessio Antonioli**, **GASWORKS** director
www.gasworks.org.uk

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Por Raquel Villar Pérez

A- Gasworks' Begining.

1- How was the idea of Gasworks born?

Gasworks was set up to provide emerging artists in London with an opportunity to develop their practice, in an environment that stimulates dialogue, exchange of ideas, and support. Since the beginning, the studios included a programme for international artists so that local artists would have the opportunity to work alongside international peers, often sharing different perspectives, references and methodologies. As a part of Triangle Arts Trust, Gasworks followed the principles of international exchange and dialogue on which the network relies.

2- When you had the idea and the project, what was the next step?

Gasworks was set up in 1994. Initially artists were invited to occupy their studio (they did pay rent to support the costs of the building) but were also lending their time to organise international residencies. They were also managing the programme of Gasworks gallery. In 1998 Gasworks became Regularly Funded by Arts Council England. This enabled the artists to employ professional curatorial and managerial staff, so that the programme could continue to grow without the artists having to limit the time they spent on their own practice.



B- Gasworks like a phisical space.

3- How did you get the space?

The space was acquired by one of the founders of Triangle Arts Trust: Robert Loder, who is leasing the building to Triangle.

4- Did you adapt the idea to the place or did you adapt the place to the idea?

The idea was really simple. To provide studios for artists and use the ground floor for a gallery space (all very modest). As such basic partitioning was erected to create separate rooms which are still used as studios and offices. (We adapted to the space as it was and continues to be the cheapest option)

5- How much important is the location of the centre?

Being centrally located makes it easier for artists who live in different parts of the city to come to their studios. We also have a public programme of activities and our location enables a wider variety of people to attend

6- Is this the first and unique location of Gasworks?

Yes

7- What did you emphasize at the time of looking for an appropriate place for Gasworks? What were you looking for?

A place for artists to work (the public programme was not one of the original ideas), as it was meant to be a place where artists could be around each other. Only later did the relation with the public become very important. Now that we have public funding, audiences and the relationship between art and the public is as important as professional development for artists.

8- Total surface and sections in the centre is necessary, according to you, to have a resources centre? (Offices, Workplaces, Exhibitions rooms, Library and documentation centre, Residency)

Please see above. Resources are great but need staff, updates and upgrades. London has many amazing resources and we want artists to use what is already there rather than create another facility which would quickly date and become sub-standard.

9- About the different spaces, what do you think is the first to have to provide service to the users? Any kind of lab, a library and documentation centre, etc.?

Gasworks is a base for artists. We provide very limited facilities. While this may appear as a problem we feel that artists (particularly those visiting from abroad) should treat the city and its immense variety of opportunities as a resource. We would not have the money to provide expensive equipment and (most importantly) continuously update and upgrade it, so it's better to offer the basics and to find partnerships with organisations that do offer specific facilities when it is necessary.

10- What kind of labs do you offer and what kind of equipment? What equipment to rent or borrow?

Basic room and basic tools. We offer wireless internet, office stationary and office equipment as well as computers with video editing facilities. Everything else we find when it is necessary

11- Could you list the staff working at Gasworks and which are the posts?

Director, Deputy Director, Assistant to the Directors (all full time) -these post split their roles and responsibilities between Gasworks and Triangle Arts Trust as they run Gasworks as well as the network.

Other staff are: Exhibitions Curator, Residency Coordinator, Education Coordinator (all full time) Communications Coordinator (part time – 3 days a week). All Gasworks staff have a volunteer to support and help them in their activities

12- Is there any specific profile of services' users of Gasworks?

Not sure what this means....artists? Audiences?art professionals?

13- Does Gasworks have an average of users at month?

Please clarify

C- Gasworks: philosophy.

14- Which do you think is the base to be a resources centre?

You have to know who you are targeting and have to find out what the target group needs. Then you measure this against what you can offer and negotiate a middle point.

15- Do you find any difference between a resources centre and a production centre? In case yes, which ones?

There are fundamental differences, inherent in the name, but Gasworks aims to be a cross between them. This is why it needs the city in order to supply what the content of the building cannot offer...the thing is that you need resources in order to produce. We don't think of Gasworks in isolation, but as part of a context where artists can move and pull things together according to their needs. Of course, this is a philosophy which is also brought about by a necessity to deal with the restrictions of the space and the limitations of budgets.

16- Which are the main attachment lines at Gasworks? Is there a thematic line? Who decide the thematic line? What about your cultural policies?

Gasworks addresses the need of artists to make new work in a context that instigates dialogue and exchange of ideas

through open-ended and process-based residencies, and through commissions that involve long-term engagement and discussion between coordinators, curators and artists. Within the multitude of cultural activities in London, Gasworks aims to consolidate its unique role as a space where international and local art practices meet to produce and display new and challenging views of contemporary art that are presented to the UK audience through its public programme of exhibitions, seminars and open studios. A more targeted and interactive programme is offered to Gasworks' local communities through specifically designed educational and outreach activities.

17- What do you advice like main goals to intend to be a resources centre?

Be relevant to your target user and be flexible as users change while institutions tend to fossilise.

18- Which are the main needs that must cover a resources centre? Must it to give priority response to the local artists needs or must provide aids to foreign artists could come?

I do think that it depends on the aims and objectives of each place. At Gasworks, our programme of activities is more geared towards providing support to visiting artists because they are new to the context and are not as familiar with the city. London-based studio holders are independent from the programme at Gasworks.

19- What are the main needs of artists making contemporary art, according to Gasworks philosophy?

To provide artists with a physical and conceptual space in which to develop, discuss and challenge their practice. With a strong focus on artists' professional development, Gasworks' studio provision and activities aim to encourage artists to make new work through experimentation and peer-to-peer dialogue. At the same time, it provides artists at early stages of their careers with curatorial and organisational support for the development of projects.

20- Which ones do you think are the main difficulties to produce artwork today?

Limitation of space and huge costs of living in the city make production difficult.

21- On what area of Visual Arts does Gasworks focus its action?

We focus on process and production (through the provision of studios and through artists commissions), but also ideas (through talks and other programmes of outreach) and dissemination (exhibitions, workshops etc..). We work outside the commercial and market place as such we can be more experimental as we don't have to produce an income from our activities.

22- Which things would you emphasize of Gasworks and which have been or are the weak points?

The first is a limited budgets for commissions. The second is that the building is old and fairly inflexible, but we try to work around this!

23- Does also Gasworks work like a kind of organisation who would intercede between artists and any public or private institution?

What do you mean?

24- Does Gasworks any help with legal advice or how to write a project? Does Gasworks have specialized staff for this?

We have people doing this but only for the programmes, not for the artists who have a studio here as they are independent. However we do offer advise and help source expertise if asked.

25- Does Gasworks use work contracts with artists who exhibe their artwork in Gasworks?

Yes.

26- Is there in England any document similar to the Manual de Buenas Prácticas en las Artes Visuales?

Yes, please contact the Arts Council of England

D- Gasworks: policy. Resources.

27- Does Gasworks operate like a private foundation or depends from government anyway?

Gasworks depends from Government and other Trusts and Foundations who support its existence and activities.

28- What are the financing sources? From where does Gasworks get the money? From public and private sources?
How is the negotiation?

Mainly public funding: Arts Council as well as many trusts and foundations that support individual projects or programmes

29- What do you think should be the relationship between a resources centre as Gasworks and the Government,
attending to culture as economic and knowledge source?

They should value the need of organisations that work outside the market as they tend to be more geared towards experimentation, enabling new ideas to develop without them being in service to capital.

30- What is the relation with the Arts Council of England?

They are one of our regular funders

E- Programs: Residency, Artists' studios, Education and Outreach.

You should be able to get information about this from our website.

F- Relationship with other centres: Triangle Arts Trust.

As a part of Triangle Arts Trust, an international network of artists and arts organisations, Gasworks is in a privileged position to conduct in-depth curatorial research and develop collaborative projects that introduce international artists to the UK and contribute new perspectives on contemporary international art. While reflecting the UK art scene through its programmes, Gasworks also draws on its links with Triangle to present emerging practices and artists from countries in Africa, Asia, Middle East and Latin America, as well as from North America and the rest of Europe.

