

## Arts, Culture & Community Award: MAYK

Awarded £2,500 for signage, plastering and decorating for project 'Polyphony'



Interview with our Grant Advisor, Crover:  
[crover@bristol.gov.uk](mailto:crover@bristol.gov.uk)

### Tell me about yourself and MAYK.

I'm Matthew Austin and MAYK is an arts production organisation based in Bristol. We established in 2011 and run lots of different projects.

We run Mayfest which is a theatre festival we put on across Bristol every other May.

We work with artists to produce, and help them tour their projects, developing ideas with them from scratch through to delivery.

The piece Bristol City Council helped us fund in The Galleries is called Polyphony. We worked with the artist, Verity Standen on the idea for around four years.

Although we're Bristol based and mainly support and work with local artists we also work internationally, helping Bristol artists tour their work to new audiences.

### What kind of people engage with your work?

It's really varied and different for each project. We engage with everyone from groups of school children to people who've retired and have more time to get involved.

A big chunk of our audience is what the Arts Council calls 'experience seekers'. These are generally single people, who don't have children, often students or people who have just graduated and are looking to build a rich, cultural life.

It's so rewarding when an audience meets the work and responds to it. Even if it's in a negative way that's equally as interesting as a positive response.

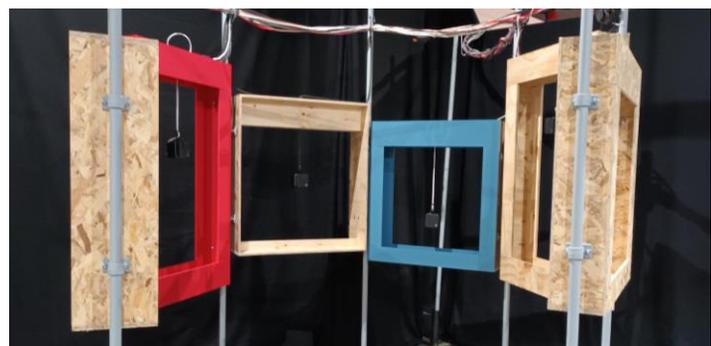
*'MAYK works with artists to produce, and help them tour their projects.'*

### How has the Polyphony installation diversified what's available in The Galleries?

It's fair to say that The Galleries is not a particularly culturally rich location. It's great to see more arts and cultural events now coming in to the city centre. It's important to give people the opportunity to access art outside of rarefied gallery spaces, somewhere that people pass by, in the heart of the city.

Having arts and cultural activities in public spaces in the city centre also brings people in who wouldn't otherwise be here. I wouldn't normally be in town but coming in today I've been in a book shop, bought a birthday card, and grabbed a coffee. Those little ripples bring more money into the area, which supports local businesses.

*'It's so rewarding when an audience meets the work and responds to it.'*



### How do you Mayk Bristol a better place to live for our residents? (get it...)

We believe that all cities should have a rich, ambitious, and vibrant cultural offer. Arts and culture make a city. It's what gives cities their vibrancy and what makes people want to come out of their houses and engage with their city. We know how big the impacts of art and culture are and we make a contribution to that through our work. Without art Bristol would be a pretty grim, boring place to live.

We're good at bringing people together and creating programmes that are unusual and maybe a bit more leftfield than 'traditional art stuff'. What we do helps people experience the city in a different way, discover new places, and meet new people. We love doing it!

*'We believe that all cities should have a rich, ambitious, and vibrant cultural offer.'*

polyphony is composed entirely from 32 people's voices.

Verity Standen and a group of fellow artist-interviewers gathered recordings from people in Bristol, Liverpool, London, Middlesbrough, Stoke-on-Trent, Cumbria and Somerset. People were invited to reflect on their voices, and each conversation followed its own path.

Everything you hear is taken from these recordings. Verity and Co-Composer Yas Clarke have cut and woven the voices together; they have combined and layered the sounds, but nothing has been added or altered.

You can hear more of the voices at [www.mayk.org.uk/mayfestradio](http://www.mayk.org.uk/mayfestradio)

### What commitments has Mayk made to sustainability?

We've written an environmental sustainability plan with local artist Rachael Clerke. This takes into account all of our work and makes a series of commitments, starting with obvious things like recycling paper, and avoiding single use plastics. We're also starting to think about how the theme of sustainability comes into the subject matter of the art itself.

Arts organisations have a long way to go with sustainability in general. One of the largest funders, Arts Council England have sustainability at the top of their agenda. It's good to see this is becoming a real focus across the industry.

The Polyphony installation was built using reclaimed materials. We've been following [The Theatre Green Book](#) which lays out how to deliver projects sustainably. We're really pleased to be able to deliver sustainable projects that look beautiful and have nothing thrown away at the end.

*'We're really pleased to be able to deliver sustainable projects that look beautiful...'*



### What's the biggest challenge of running an events-based organisation?

You're putting all your eggs in one basket. Our festivals involve lots of outdoor work, and if the weather's really bad it can have a catastrophic impact on budgets and profits. Everything we do is for short periods of time, working to tight deadlines, and we have to rely on people buying tickets.

We need to balance our desire to do ambitious stuff against making sure we bring people in to engage with and pay for it.

*'I've learned to be comfortable with the difficult bits... people will meet the work, they'll enjoy it and that's the payoff...'*



**What's the biggest thing you've learnt through your work with Mayk?**

We have this catch phrase 'It's only theatre. No one's gonna die!'. If something goes wrong, it'll usually be fixable and if it isn't, then never mind, we'll learn something for next time.

I've learned to be comfortable with the difficult bits, from failed funding applications to things going wrong with the production. People don't know the stress you've been through they'll just show up, enjoy it and that's the payoff. That's what you remember.

*'It wouldn't have been affordable to realise this piece without the funding.'*

**Learn more about MAYK**

**Web: [www.mayk.org.uk](http://www.mayk.org.uk)  
Tel: 07704 601861**



**How has this funding supported you to trade and achieve your goals?**

The short answer is, if we hadn't have won this funding, we wouldn't have been to launch this project.

It's allowed us to decorate and dress a space to make it suitable for audiences to interact with. It wouldn't have been affordable to realise this piece without the funding. It's been a bit of a life saver!